

30 SEP 1998

Mahathir-police

MAHATHIR ASSURES FULL PROBE INTO ANWAR'S ASSAULT CLAIM

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said a full inquiry will be conducted into Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's claim that he suffered injuries due to assault by police during detention under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

He said appropriate action would be taken against the police personnel involved if there is truth in Anwar's allegations.

Until then, no quarters should rush into making accusations of police brutality against the country's police force, he said at a news conference at his office in Jalan Dato' Onn here.

Dr Mahathir said this issue should also not disrupt the court process against Anwar who was charged in the Sessions Court here yesterday on nine counts namely five counts of corruption and four counts of sexual improprieties.

Anwar was sacked as deputy prime minister and finance minister on Sept 2 and expelled from Umno, the next day.

Anwar, sporting a bruised left eye when he appeared in public for the first time since his detention last Sept 20, told the court that he was punched and slapped by police until his left eye bruised, his nose bled and his lips cut.

Anwar, who led an illegal city procession from the National Mosque here on Sept 20 was later arrested under the ISA for threatening national security.

Asked whether Anwar could have self-inflicted the injuries to gain sympathy and to prove right his claim that he would be tortured upon arrest, Dr Mahathir said that was not something impossible.

"According to some quarters, this is not something that is impossible as he will gain much mileage if it can be shown that he is being tortured by police," said Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister.

The prime minister also did not dismiss the possibility of Anwar sustaining the injuries out of his provocation of the police till they had to restrain him.

"Whether he planned this or not, I dare not say, but there is a possibility that he deliberately did something rebellious that the police had to stop or something that prompted the police to resort to violence...the ensuing situation may have caused the injuries that we have seen," he said.

Describing Anwar as someone conversant with such matters, Dr Mahathir said Anwar had already made allegations, through his wife Datin Seri Wan Azizah, that his life would be in danger once he is detained under the ISA.

"His wife said she feared for Anwar's life and this time we've seen the injury marks ... why? Why was he assaulted, if at all he was beaten?"

"As for Datuk Seri Anwar, this is to his advantage as it is now seen that he has already experienced what he had forecast at the very outset. His prediction was, if arrested he'll be tortured."

The prime minister said no quarters should presume that Anwar's injuries were definitely inflicted by the police in their effort to elicit something from him.

He said several other people like opposition leader Lim Kit Siang and in fact Anwar himself, had been detained by the police before and they had not lodged complaints of assault or mistreatment then.

"Many people get detained by the police but there's no proof that they

(the police) inflict injuries as (part) of their process," said Dr Mahathir.

"I don't see any benefit at all for the police to do something to Anwar as they need not secure a confession from him.

"The police are also mindful that they will have to take Anwar to court and obviously when brought to court and that he is seen with injuries, this will only invite allegations against the police," he said.

Nonetheless, the prime minister emphasised that the government would not condone any unlawful police action.

"They cannot harm their detainees even at the interrogation or other stages," said Dr Mahathir, who believed that the foreign media would now highlight the latest development in Anwar's case to reinforce their claims of the Malaysian government being dictatorial.

He said the foreign media would also divert public attention from Anwar's trial by harping on allegations of police brutality.

Dr Mahathir said the Attorney-General had already ordered an inquiry into Anwar's allegations and it would be carried out by a special team of police officers not connected with the Special Branch to ensure the team's independence.

He emphasised that policemen are largely professional and would want to prove that their tasks are carried out in keeping with their principles of professionalism.

-- BERNAMA

RN