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`Nation not moving towards being an authoritarian govt'

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday denied talks that Malaysia is drifting towards being an authoritarian Government following the arrest of his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his allies under the Internal Security Act (ISA) on Monday.

"I think you are an authoritarian when you make accusations before you even find the real facts. One should actually listen to both sides and then make a very reasonable opinion.

"But when you just read the newspapers and make an opinion based on that, I think that is very dictatorial," he added.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on a statement by Australian Prime Minister John Howard that the Malaysian Government is moving towards being an authoritarian following Anwar's arrest under the ISA.

"The Australian Prime Minister is absolutely wrong (about Malaysian being an authoritarian)," he told a news conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. The news conference was to explain the outcome of the special Umno supreme council meeting yesterday.

In his opening remarks at the news conference, Dr Mahathir said he explained to council members on the action taken against Anwar and his followers for causing a public disturbance and threatened the national security on Sunday.

However, he noted that it was not worthwhile to explain, especially to foreign media, because no matter what he says, the news agencies will stick to their own conclusion about the situation in the country.

"But the fact is that he (Anwar) has been allowed to break the law many times, by holding illegal meetings and rallies around the country. However, he was not arrested.

"The climax only came on Sunday, when he (Anwar) instigated his followers to riot, to do violent and to attack certain places. It is clearly that he is working up emotions in order to develop the kind of emotions that was found in Indonesia, when people rioted daily trying to obstruct normal life in the city.

"And they hope that way, they can overthrow the Government, in particular to overthrow me, which is not really a concern anyway as I am 73 years old, and would not last forever.

"But the fact that he urged them to do damage to the city, and there is evidence that he is trying to do the same thing to other parts of the country ...

"What their intentions are, when they marched into my official residence is something that I cannot be sure about. But there were talk among them, about burning my house. So it is obvious that, from merely talking to his followers in his house and elsewhere, he has now decided to become a rebel rouser, who wants to instigate violence.

"And of course he had to do it on a Sunday, partly because of the confessions by these two persons (Sukma Darmawan and Dr Munawar Anees) with whom he has committed sodomy on Saturday.

"Also because the Commonwealth Games is on, the police will be occupied with looking after the Games, and also because he felt the presence of a large number of foreign journalists would be good for his cause," he said, adding the problems now have been spread throughout the world, and that Dr Mahathir has become a dictator.

AFP reports: Australia warned yesterday that political turmoil in

Malaysia could threaten the future of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) group due to meet in Kuala Lumpur in November.

Deputy Prime Minister and Trade Minister Tim Fischer said he was deeply concerned about the possibility of a rapid deterioration of affairs in Malaysia and that political instability could threaten Apec's future.

"I have absolute fear that things might deteriorate very rapidly and that in turn will jeopardise the prospects of a constructive working meeting of Apec," he told the Australian Financial Review.

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