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PM: Govt will act if Anwar was indeed assaulted

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday promised action against the police if they had indeed assaulted Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"This Government does not condone any unlawful act by police," he told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, a day after Anwar had lodged a police report that he was punched and slapped by police while under detention.

But Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, said no one should accuse the police of having caused Anwar's injuries. "We cannot put the blame on the police before we conduct a full probe into the matter."

Anwar's claim to have been beaten up should also not be used to disrupt court proceedings against him, he added.

The sacked deputy prime minister had lodged a police report in a court in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday, after pleading not guilty to four counts of sexual improprieties and five counts of corruption. In the report, he claimed to have been punched and slapped by police while locked up under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

A special team is investigating Anwar's allegation. Dr Mahathir said, in response to a question, that the possibility that his injuries were self-inflicted cannot be ruled out.

Anwar has been detained under the ISA since September 20 for threatening national security. After his sacking from the Cabinet on September 2 and Umno a day later, the former student leader had held illegal assemblies, including at mosques, that led to him being held responsible for inciting thousands of his supporters to stage riots in the city.

He had been sacked for alleged sexual misconduct, treason and corruption.

Dr Mahathir said the Government will take action if the police officers involved had acted outside their authority. He also raised questions as to whether the police were responsible since there was no reason at all for them to assault Anwar, especially since they know Anwar would be charged in open court.

"We cannot assume that the injuries sustained by Datuk Seri Anwar were caused by police. Anwar was once detained under the ISA and we have detained people like (opposition leader) Lim Kit Siang, but there has never been a report about being beaten up in detention," he added.

The Prime Minister said he expected the foreign media to use Anwar's allegation to write about police brutality in Malaysia. To the international media, the purported incident proved that Anwar and his wife were right to fear for his life, he said.

Asked how independent would the investigations be, Dr Mahathir said the policemen carrying out the inquiry are professionals and would want to prove their professionalism clearly.

The Prime Minister said he failed to see how the police would benefit from hurting Anwar, especially when they were not expecting a confession because he was to be charged in court.

"However, we realise that Anwar seemed injured and we need to know why," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked whether the police could have hurt Anwar because he had provoked members of the team investigating his case, Dr Mahathir said the possibility was there as Anwar himself had tried to split the police force.

When suggested that the team investigating Anwar's case disqualify themselves following his allegations, Dr Mahathir said: "In the first place, we have to determine who is responsible. How can we change (the investigating team) unless we know who or what was involved.

"But if you want to change en masse, then you are penalising people who are probably innocent. So, this inquiry is the first phase of the process to determine who's responsible."

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