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Probe into Anwar's claims begins (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The high-powered team of police officers formed to investigate Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's allegations that he was assaulted while in police custody began its work today.

The team is headed by Malacca Criminal Investigation Department head Assistant Commissioner of Police Mat Zain Ibrahim.

Mat Zain, 48, with 23 years of experience in the police force, has been seconded to the Federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman. Other members of the team are senior police officers of the CID.

Mat Zain took over as Malacca CID chief in May last year, after a stint as Selangor CID deputy chief.

Confirming this today, Malacca police chief Senior Assistant Commissioner I Arthur Edmonds said Mat Zain had been assigned to the task and instructed to begin investigations immediately.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that if the investigation into Anwar's allegations showed that the police had indeed harmed the former Deputy Prime Minister, action would be taken.

He said the Government would not tolerate any unlawful police action. He, however, cautioned that it would be wrong for anyone to put the blame on the police for the alleged assault until after this had been carefully determined.

Dr Mahathir also said the investigation would be carried out by a special team of police officers not connected with the Special Branch to ensure the team's independence.

It is also understood that work to identify members of the probe team began two days ago, soon after Anwar had lodged a police report pertaining to the assault in Bukit Aman.

It is also learnt that officers from the police's disciplinary branch in Bukit Aman would also not be involved in this probe. It is not immediately known whether the team has been given any specific timeframe for its probe.

The findings of the investigation would be submitted to Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister.

Anwar appeared in the Sessions Court here on Tuesday to face charges of corrupt practices and unnatural sex. Appearing in public for the first time since his arrest on Sept 20, Anwar had a bruised left eye and told the court that he was punched and slapped by the police.

It is learnt that, among others, the team would back-track events leading to Anwar's alleged assault, starting possibly with the night he was arrested.

The team would also question police officers who were assigned to interrogate Anwar, and those on duty at the lock-up where Anwar was held.

Anwar was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister on Sept 2 and expelled from Umno the following day.

He was charged in the Sessions Court here on five counts of corrupt practices and four counts of unnatural sex on Tuesday and one more count of unnatural sex at the Petaling Jaya Sessions Court yesterday.

Anwar, who was represented by eight lawyers, claimed trial on all the 10 charges.

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