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Umno is willing to take back Anwar's supporters, says Dr Mahathir

ALOR STAR, Fri. - Umno is willing to accept those who had supported Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's reformation movement back into its fold, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Speaking to reporters after a gathering at Dewan Jitra in Jitra, the Prime Minister however said the party had not made any decision on them so far.

"If they have realised (the truth) we accept them back because we know that they have been influenced by Anwar," he said.

Asked what would happen if they still wanted to continue to fight for the movement, he said: "If we find them to be still active, we will ask them why."

When asked whether he would tour the nation to explain the issue, Dr Mahathir said he might have to make several visits to certain places as there were still people who were confused about the issue.

He said he was not sure whether he could go. "But it seems that there are still people who are confused and I still have to explain to them just as I did in (natiowide tours) to explain the economic problems.

"But I hope I don't have to go to too many places," he added.

To another question on the end of demonstrations by Anwar's supporters, Dr Mahathir said he hoped it had stopped for good to enable the court to carry out its duties in a peaceful atmosphere.

On a suggestion that an independent team be set up to investigate Anwar's allegations that he was assaulted by the police during detention, the Prime Minister said the high-powered team of police officers that was formed was independent.

He said such team had examined similar cases and accusations before and they had been professional.

"If the police are in the wrong they will make a decision. But if you have an indepedent team, we still do not how independent the team is going to be...the independent team may be more biased and inclined towards Anwar," he added.

Earlier, speaking at a mosque in Guar Napai after performing Friday prayers, Dr Mahathir said his replacement need not necessarily be a very religious person.

However, he said it was of utmost importance for the person to have a good character.

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