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Mahathir-Winding (Court)

ANWAR'S COUNSEL WANTS TO SHUT ME UP, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 20 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the move by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's defence counsel to cite him for contempt of court was an attempt to scare and prevent him from talking about the conduct of the former deputy prime minister.

The Prime Minister said his policy address at the Umno general assembly on Friday was not in contempt of court because he did not at all touch on Anwar's case which is being heard by the court.

Dr Mahathir said he had been very careful when talking about Anwar, and had adhered to the prepared text to avoid running foul of the law.

"Even though I exercised caution, an allegation has been made that I tried to influence the proceedings against Anwar. I did not at all touch on what is being heard. I only related what happened based on what I know," he said when winding up the debate at the close of the general assembly here.

"I spent time to study what I had written, and I only read out what was written, and I used a text because I wanted to avoid committing contempt of court," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the attempt to intimidate him from speaking was actually aimed at protecting the interests of certain people.

The High Court here yesterday ordered Anwar's defence team to file a proper application if it was serious about citing Dr Mahathir for contempt for his speech at the assembly.

Justice Datuk Arifin Jaka ordered this after hearing a verbal application by counsel Karpal Singh to commit the Prime Minister to prison for contempt of court.

In his winding-up speech today, Dr Mahathir again used a prepared text to speak on the matter.

Dr Mahathir said he had given an undertaking to the defence counsel in Anwar's corruption trial earlier that he was willing to be subpoenaed as a witness.

He said Anwar's lawyers were given the undertaking in writing, but the defence counsel instead only asked him to make a written statement.

"This thing is difficult, and it is not possible for me to write down all that is needed to be answered. Therefore, I informed Datuk Seri Anwar's lawyer that I would answer all the questions in court.

"Unfortunately, Datuk Seri Anwar and his lawyers chose not to subpoena me to court for questioning," he said.

Dr Mahathir said what was regrettable was that word was subsequently spread alleging that he was scared of answering questions given to him by Anwar's lawyers.

He said if he was summoned to court he would have a choice to answer whatever questions posed to him.

"Because I was not invited and I could not give any reply, many negative interpretations were made against me. This is not the aim of the laws on contempt of court, that is to protect something that is clearly unfair," he said.

The Prime Minister also said that in the United States the people were free to discuss cases that were being tried in court, including debating on television President Bill Clinton's (sex scandal) case.

He said the laws of that country did not say that when a person was charged in court, his name and other matters related to him could not be mentioned outside the court.

When the judge in Anwar's trial issued a gag order, Anwar's lawyers felt that it denied freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

So when the judge agreed and lifted the gag order, the public had the right to speak, write and report on Anwar's case, he said.

The Prime Minister also said Anwar's case might drag on for years until the year 2005.

"In the meantime, we will have the election. Does it mean that in the next general election we cannot mention Datuk Seri Anwar's name and his other conduct?" he said.

"While we cannot touch on his case, are we barred from mentioning his name and other things connected to him until his case ends following +appeal+ after +appeal+?" he said.

On the other hand, Anwar was free to issue statement after statement, and articles from the prison condemning the legal process, trial, conspiracy of the Prime Minister and other matters that hit right on his case, he said.

"Why is it that he can and we cannot mention even a little bit of anything connected to his case?" he said.

Dr Mahathir also claimed that Anwar wrote a statement in court yesterday, but purposely did not sign it so that he could deny making the statement.

The Prime Minister said the court did not prevent Anwar from making statements outside the court.

Dr Mahathir said certain people and sections of the media had also tried to influence and threaten the court by holding demonstrations and alleging that what was on trial was not Anwar but the court.

"Aren't such attempts also contempt of the court?" he said.

"If not why is my speech that Datuk Seri Anwar was expelled because of his morals and his conduct prevented him from becoming Umno president and in fact from becoming Umno member considered contempt of court, and the lawyer asked the court to commit me to prison?"

The Prime Minister said he had a duty to make clarifications to clear any confusion which could cause hatred towards the government.

"As such, I will reply one by one the allegations he made outside the court. The freedom he has must be given to me too.

"I will not touch on the charge against him which is being heard or which is under appeal. I will speak on matters for which he is not charged in court or not yet charged," he said.

Dr Mahathir also described Anwar as a person who was good in using psychology to frighten people.

Citing as an example, he said Anwar would tell people that the Prime Minister would relay to him (Anwar) what others had told him about Anwar.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar did this so that people would be afraid to tell him things about Anwar.

-- BERNAMA
MOK RON YBY