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Assault on Anwar: Hearing to begin on Feb 22

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The independent commission of inquiry investigating Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's injuries sustained while in police custody has tentatively fixed hearing to begin on Feb 22 with proceedings to be open to the public.

Former Attorney-General Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman, who is leading investigations for the commission, said the panel met informally for the first time today and decided that the hearing would begin on Feb 22 "provided that all administrative arrangements are in place."

"The three-member panel is of the unanimous view that the public should be allowed to attend the hearing," Abu Talib told a Press conference today.

The panel, headed by former Chief Judge of Malaya Tan Sri Anuar Zainal Abidin, is taking over investigations from the police.

Also on the panel are former Court of Appeal Judge Datuk Mahadev Shankar and Pantai Medical Centre's consultant orthopaedic surgeon Datuk Dr Yeoh Poh Hong.

Abu Talib said as the commission members have yet to receive their letters of appointment, they could not begin work.

He said the members have been told that they would receive their letters of appointment in due course.

"We have been told that the letters are in the process of being handed to us. It is awaiting the approval and consent of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong," he said.

Asked whether he would be calling Prime Minister and former Home Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Anwar, former Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Rahim Noor as witnesses, Abu Talib said:

"If necessary, I've to call Datuk Seri Anwar to give evidence in fairness to all concerned. I will call any person whom I believe could assist me and the commission in our investigations.

"I've also got to meet up with all police witnesses whom I believe can assist me to get to the bottom of the matter to enable me to present my case fully and fairly for the consideration of the commission.

"If I can get 10 witnesses who can assist me in my investigations, I will stop. I do not intend to bring unnecessary and irrelevant matters to the attention of the commission."

Abu Talib said under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, the commission was empowered to call any witness who in their view could assist them in their case.

Abu Talib said he had already contacted Anwar's leading counsel Raja Aziz Addruse to provide him a statement from Anwar of the alleged assault.

Asked who else was on his witness list, Abu Talib said that it was too early to say.

He said those called as witnesses would be entitled to have legal representation.

"The length of inquiry depends on how many witnesses I call. The commission can also call whoever it thinks can assist them.

"Then, the commission will also need time to submit the report to the King. So, it is very difficult to give a time frame," he said, adding that the public should not form the opinion that the commission was dragging its feet.

Asked whether he would refer to the findings by the police, Abu Talib