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Dr M: No promise made to Anwar

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he had never promised Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim that the latter would not be prosecuted if he resigned voluntarily.

The Prime Minister said the power to prosecute did not rest with him but with the Attorney-General.

"It is not my right to determine this. Actually, he himself brought about the charges following a police report made on the letters. And when the police discovered that an offence had been committed, action had to be taken...I have no power to stop that," he said.

This was Dr Mahathir's first public comment on his former deputy after the latter was sentenced to a six-year jail term by the High Court on April 14. Anwar was found guilty on four counts of corruption.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a Press conference after tabling the mid-term review of the Seventh Malaysia Plan in the Dewan Rakyat.

He said this when asked whether further charges would be brought against Anwar.

Alluding to Anwar's mitigation where he claimed that the Prime Minister had given him an ultimatum to resign or face charges, Dr Mahathir said:

"What I told him was that it would be better for him to withdraw the normal way...ministers have been sacked, menteri besar have been dismissed and brought to court but there are no demonstrations. But he refused and declared that he would fight back."

Dr Mahathir said it would be up to the AG to decide whether more charges would be brought against Anwar.

"This is something the AG will have to decide. I have no say in all these things. That is his business. This is the problem with Anwar. He thinks he can interfere with the process of law which is why he interfered in the case involving the letters. He expects me to interfere in the same way."

Dr Mahathir said the law must be allowed to take its due course without any interference.

"We always talk about everybody being equal before the law. But when we or our friends have to face action, we say the laws are no good.

"The action against Anwar is the same as those taken against the former Selangor Menteri Besar and Cabinet Ministers...We have never interfered. Even if it involves a Cabinet Minister, I have never said he should not be charged because of his status."

On whether the charging of former Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Rahim Noor in court today for attempting to cause grievous hurt to Anwar while under police custody would stop accusations that the Government practiced selective prosecution, Dr Mahathir said he did not think so. "No, not at all. Those who have made up their minds that this is a rotten country will continue to say so. Their supporters will keep on saying things are rotten."

He said this concerned one's state of mind and had nothing to do with facts or the system.

Citing as an example his earlier speech in the House on the mid-term review, Dr Mahathir said it was delivered without any political motive.

"I never mentioned anything political but on the economy of the country and how we can revive it.

"But as you can see my opposite number (Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang,

the first MP to debate on the review) had already written a speech which was political. He has not heard my speech, which means he wanted to talk about politics, the detention of his son, the black eye, the judiciary system, the laws...all these are political."

Dr Mahathir said this showed that people like Lim had already made up their minds and nothing else made a difference.

"They have a closed mind. They will keep on repeating what they have been saying all this time."

On whether the people would be influenced by this, Dr Mahathir said the Government would keep explaining the truth.

"I am confident the people are sensible and the majority of them would not take part in street demonstrations, smashing the windscreen of cars and setting fire to rubbish bins. (On the contrary) I noticed many did not support such behaviour."

Dr Mahathir said the rabble-rousers wanted to create chaos and disturbances like in Indonesia.

"This is what they want but Malaysians are not like that. Although there has been violence, it has not been excessive.

"Those active are only young people who have yet to enter employment, have no responsibilities, are not bothered about income and received scholarships that were paid by the people."

Dr Mahathir, who was discharged last week from the National Heart Institute where he was treated for a lung infection, was also asked about how he was feeling now.

"Being able to speak for one hour and five minutes...I think it is a good indicator (of my health)...and I spoke in the same old voice, not hoarse."

On whether this meant that the people should no longer be worried about his health, he said: "I don't think it should be. I will have cough off and on. Sometimes it becomes severe, sometimes not so severe. If I can put up with it, I will manage."

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