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Dr M: I'm just stating my own experience

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday he did not commit contempt of court when he spoke about his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in his presidential address at the Umno general assembly.

Dr Mahathir said he was merely relating his experience and did not touch on Anwar's ongoing sodomy trial.

"I respect the court but I am talking about my own experience. Am I not allowed to say anything about my own experience? That I talked to Anwar, that this is what he said? I'm not allowed to say that?"

At a Press conference at the end of the second day of the assembly, he said there was already one case filed against him for alleged contempt and "now as a Prime Minister I must must not say anything?".

"When the trial judge placed a gag (order), they opposed because it was against freedom of speech. Yet when I speak, I am told to shut up, otherwise I will be cited for contempt.

"Whereas, they write letters from jail, they write letters from the court, they distribute things, they put things on the Internet and say nasty things about me and the Government, but I must not say anything because if I do, it is contempt of court," he added.

"So if the court case drags on for five years, I will not be able to campaign even for the election.

"So the only way I can shut up anybody against me is to have a case in court and drag it on for years so nobody can say anything about me ... and these people talk about freedom of the Press and freedom of speech."

On whether he himself would take legal action over the things said about him, he said he believed in freedom of the Press and freedom of speech.

Dr Mahathir also spoke about allegations he had built a "palace" for himself in Putrajaya.

He said the Prime Minister's official residence was actually designed by Anwar.

"That is the reason why the house has six other rooms besides the room for the Prime Minister. I only have two children who are still living with me."

Anwar, sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister on Sept 2 last year, has six children.

Dr Mahathir also expressed suspicion that Anwar had wanted to do away with the Deputy Prime Minister's post once he became Prime Minister.

"He (Anwar) did not want to build a house for the Deputy Prime Minister (at Putrajaya). When he becomes PM, I suspect he doesn't want a deputy."

He was asked if Anwar, then the Finance Minister, had approved an allocation to build an official residence for the Deputy Prime Minister in Putrajaya.

"He didn't expect to live in the Deputy Prime Minister's house for long. So, there was no point in building a house for himself."

He said Anwar also rejected a proposal to build a palace for the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong in Putrajaya.

Asked if an official residence would now be built in Putrajaya for Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Dr Mahathir said it should "because there must be a Deputy Prime Minister".

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