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Dr M: Comments about Anwar not in contempt of court

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UMNO president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday defended his right to speak about Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's behaviour, particularly to answer the allegations made against him by his former deputy.

In his closing address at the 53rd Umno General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir said his comments about Anwar when opening the assembly last Friday were not in contempt of court.

"Unfortunately there are attempts to scare me into not giving my views, so that certain people's interests are protected. There is already pressure on me that I should be imprisoned because I made a speech," he said.

The High Court has allowed the defence in Anwar's on-going sodomy trial to file an application to commit the Prime Minister to prison for contempt, following his speech at the general assembly.

"I did not insult the court. I was careful in writing my speech and only read what was written. I did not refer to anything about the ongoing court case. I only spoke about what happened which I have knowledge of," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he hopes he is given an opportunity to clarify allegations made against him during Anwar's court proceedings, more so when the allegations are not related to the charges Anwar faced.

"I gave a written admission to Anwar's lawyers that I was willing to be called as a witness. But they only asked me to make a written statement. This is a complicated matter and there is no way I can write all that needs to be answered, so I told Anwar's lawyers that I will answer all questions in court.

"Unfortunately Anwar and his lawyers chose not to call me to the court to be questioned. That was their choice, not mine," he added.

Dr Mahathir said what is disappointing is that after not being called, he was said to be afraid of answering the questions posed to him.

"I have a choice to answer any questions posed to me in the court. That is my choice. If I don't want to give written answers I can be called to court, but I was not called," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar, on the other hand, is free to send letters out of prison and make statements not only about his case but also insult the process of law, court proceedings and make charges of a conspiracy.

"And what about the people and media who openly praise Anwar and say he is innocent, that the courts are unfair? They claim that the courts had predetermined Anwar's guilt, which is an attempt to pressure the courts to pass a verdict of not guilty.

"Yes, I admit I talked about Anwar's behaviour and morals, but not about the case currently being heard. There are other aspects. His poor morals make him unsuitable to become Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister or even an Umno member," he said, and proceeded to give some examples.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar is someone who knows how to use psychology to get people to support him. One way is to scare people about their position.

"He often tells people that whatever people tell me I will eventually tell him. So people are scared to tell me anything about Anwar. Actually I don't tell him at all. But I know he has an effective network of spies. He knows my schedule, who I meet," he added.

Dr Mahathir said when anyone tells him something about someone else he

prefers to keep it to himself. He said he will only believe what he is told when he receives the same information from at least three different sources.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar had even released a statement responding to his opening speech at the Umno general assembly, but was clever enough not to sign the written statement so that he could deny writing it later.

Reading from a copy of the letter, Dr Mahathir said Anwar alleges, among others, that the Prime Minister asked Petroliam Nasional (Petronas) to give RM2 billion to his son, Mirzan; that he went ahead with wasteful mega-projects including the Prime Minister's residence in Putrajaya; and, that he insulted the ulama.

Dr Mahathir then described how each of the allegations was false. The sale of shipping vessels by Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd (KPB), of which Mirzan is a director, to Petronas subsidiary MISC was actually at a loss to KPB.

He said independent valuers had put the value of the assets at US\$313 million (US\$1 = RM3.80), but MISC had actually paid US\$224 million for the vessels.

"Actually KPB had earlier received an offer from a Chinese company which would have paid more, but I told Mirzan that this is a Bumiputera company and that he should not sell it to a Chinese company," Dr Mahathir said. He said the list of share allocations released by the Ministry of Finance also proves who had actually benefited during the period that Anwar was Finance Minister.

On the Prime Minister's residence in Putrajaya, Dr Mahathir said Anwar was responsible for selecting the contractors and payments. The design of the house, which has six rooms for children, also shows that it is intended for Anwar's use, not his.

"He (Anwar) was against building a residence for the Deputy Prime Minister in Putrajaya because he wanted to move there as Prime Minister. Perhaps he did not even intend to have a deputy," he said.

On the ulama, Dr Mahathir said not everyone who claims to be an ulama is knowledgeable in Islam. There are those who interpret Islam merely to satisfy their own vested interest.

"If you tell me that someone who says God uses profanity is an ulama, I cannot accept that, even if he is the president of a party that professes to be Islamic," he said.

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