

21/06/1999

Dr M: I'm not in contempt of court (HL)

Nuraina Samad

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was not in contempt of court when he spoke about the misconduct of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in his opening address at the Umno general assembly on Friday.

The Prime Minister said he was merely relating what had happened and what he knew to have happened.

"I was careful in making the speech. I took time to be very careful ... I only read what was written. I did not at all touch on the facts of the ongoing case or the proceedings," the Umno president said in his adjournment speech at the end of the three-day assembly at Dewan Merdeka of the Putra World Trade Centre here.

He was referring to the application by counsel for Sukma Darmawan Sasmitaat Madja, Karpal Singh, to cite Dr Mahathir for contempt of court for his speech.

Sukma is being charged together with the former Deputy Prime Minister for sodomy.

Karpal Singh made an oral application claiming that parts of Dr Mahathir's speech had affected the chance for a fair trial for Anwar.

Dr Mahathir told the assembly that there was an attempt to curtail his freedom of speech by intimidating him and threatening to commit him to prison.

But he said this attempt was made because he was speaking in the interest of the country.

Dr Mahathir, who earlier spoke off-the-cuff, proceeded to read from a prepared text because he said he did not want to be accused of acting in contempt of the court again.

The Umno chief, among other things, said the processes of law would take a long time and Anwar's case could go on until 2005.

"Meantime, we will hold elections. Does this mean that during the elections, we cannot mention Anwar's name or his conduct?"

"While we cannot touch on his case, does this mean we cannot mention his name and others who have to do with him until his case ends following appeal after appeal?"

Dr Mahathir said meanwhile Anwar was free to issue statement after statement, letters and articles from prison.

"And we are not to say anything? This is unfair," he said, adding that Anwar had not only written about his case, but had also condemned the Government.

Dr Mahathir also questioned the action of pro-Anwar media which had already found Anwar to be innocent and had accused the process of law and the court to be unfair.

"In fact, while proceedings were going on, they accused the court of already finding Anwar guilty."

Dr Mahathir asked whether the actions to influence the court by Anwar and his supporters, including the demonstrations, were not a form of "contempt of court".

"If not, then why was my speech that Anwar was removed because of his morals and conduct which had prevented him from becoming Umno president or even an Umno member, regarded as a contempt of court and his lawyers want the court to have me jailed?"

Dr Mahathir admitted to having spoken of Anwar's misconduct which had disqualified him from being Umno president or member but, stressed that he

did not touch on his ongoing trial.

"His morals and conduct I was referring to are not those mentioned by the court but other things. For example, I mentioned about him making private phone calls to someone's wife without the husband's knowledge.

"He himself had admitted in a supreme council meeting that he likes to flirt with women. Besides that, there were two women who admitted to me that Anwar tried to have sexual relations with them but they refused. And a woman who admitted to having been taken to a house to have sex with Anwar ... this one didn't refuse.

"There is a driver who told me that he had brought a prostitute to have sex with Anwar. And this driver said he had brought many prostitutes to Anwar and he had washed the room and other things."

Dr Mahathir reiterated that in Anwar's trial, he is not involved but has been accused (by Anwar) to have conspired to overthrow him.

"The case has nothing to do with me or whether or not there exists a conspiracy against him. The case has to do with a completely different matter and I don't wish at all to mention it to avoid insulting the court."

He said he had hoped to be given the opportunity to explain the allegations against him during the trial and had told Anwar's lawyers that he was willing to be subpoenaed as a witness.

He said Anwar's lawyers had received his written agreement but they had asked him to instead make written statements which he said would be difficult as it would be impossible for him to put in writing all that needed to be replied.

"I then told Anwar's lawyers that I will answer all the questions in court but unfortunately, Anwar and his lawyers chose not to subpoena me."

Dr Mahathir said because he was not asked to testify in court, there were all sorts of speculations about him and his actions including that he was afraid.

(END)