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Justice system has been consistently reviewed, says PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the country's justice system had always been reviewed from time to time, especially when it was felt that there were inadequacies.

The Prime Minister, interviewed over CNN's International Biz Asia programme this evening, was asked whether it was time to review the system following the corruption trial of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

During the 30-minute interview, Dr Mahathir was asked a wide range of questions, from Anwar's trial to the general election. At the outset, he was asked whether he was satisfied that justice had been served in Anwar's first trial.

Dr Mahathir said he was satisfied that justice was done but added: "There is no convincing people who have already made up their minds that if he is convicted than there is no justice. If he is not, then there is."

He was also asked whether Anwar's case had damaged the credibility of the judicial system.

Replying, the Prime Minister said: "Well, yes and no. Because people have already decided that since he is popular with them, any trial involving him which led to his conviction would be unfair.

"But the judge and the prosecution have done a good job. If they (critics) care to read the judge's report which is 380 pages, they would have found out that he couldn't have been making up all these things.

"He has given every reason for whatever decisions that he arrived at. But the people who made comments never even once read the basis of the judgment. So it is not being fair to the judge who has tried his very best to be fair. It was an open court - diplomats were there, the media was there, everybody was there, how much more open can we get?"

When asked whether it was time to review the country's justice system, Dr Mahathir said: "The justice system has always been reviewed from time to time and when we feel we are inadequate in any way, we will make amends. But there have been other trials involving other people for the same charges, politicians who have been sentenced by the courts, and nobody said the judicial system was not good."

Asked whether as Home Minister (then) he had authorised the beating of Anwar while in police custody, Dr Mahathir said he would have been "an idiot" to authorise it.

"I am a politician ... I have been a fairly successful politician. I will be an idiot to order a beating which will only make me look very bad in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of Malaysians.

"I wouldn't do a stupid thing like that," he said. The second part of the interview will be aired tomorrow. Dr Mahathir was first interviewed on the same programme last Nov 10.

Asked whether he knew about the assault, Dr Mahathir said he did not.

Asked why former Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor has not been prosecuted as he had admitted to beating Anwar, Dr Mahathir said it was a matter of time before this was done.

"It will take time as the courts in Malaysia are very busy - what with people suing one another for libel and things like that. All these need to be attended to. He (Rahim) will be tried in time," he said. (The Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court has fixed Rahim's trial for Sept 20-24).

Asked why Anwar was arrested before being charged while Rahim remained free, the Prime Minister said Anwar was arrested because he had incited

the people to riot.

"Anwar was put in jail simply because he was inciting the people to violence. Initially he was going around the country giving talks to 10,000, 20,000 people but nobody stopped him.

"When he started inciting people to riot and to burn vehicles and all that, he had to be stopped and that was why he was arrested," he said.

The Prime Minister was also asked to comment on speculation that he would announce his resignation at tomorrow's Umno general assembly.

Responding, Dr Mahathir said there was no reason for him to resign at this moment in time.

Dr Mahathir said he would only hand over the reins of Government to his successor after the outcome of the next general election.

Asked whether Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's position as the number two was secure, Dr Mahathir said: "(It is)... as secure as can be, I think, unless something unusual happens."

Asked whether Abdullah was ready to take over, Dr Mahathir said he (Abdullah) had done well but added that there was no harm in waiting a little to see if he has settled in properly.

Asked whether Parti Keadilan Nasional led by Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail was a worthy opponent in the coming election, Dr Mahathir said he never underestimated any party.

"Well, we never take anything casually. We always give due attention ... and we will see whether there is any credibility or not in their coalition or in this new party called Adil," he said, adding that being complacent was not good for a politician.

On whether Malaysia would follow Indonesia by inviting Western observers to monitor the coming election, Dr Mahathir said there was no need to do so.

"For them (Indonesia), this is their first free election. For us, we have had elections every five years since Independence in 1957. We are well versed on how to conduct elections," he said.

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