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Mahathir-Trial

LENGTH OF ANWAR'S TRIAL SURPRISES DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 15 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is surprised that Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's corruption trial, which entered its 72nd day today, has been dragging on for so long.

"I'm not surprised at the events that have been unfolded during the trial but I'm surprised at the way the proceedings have taken place because never in the history of this country has a trial dragged on so long, with nine lawyers defending the defendant, and such coverage of a trial that has never ever been seen in Malaysia by both the local and the foreign media.

"That is what surprises me. And what surprises me most (is) despite all this, we are accused of not having a fair trial. I don't know what is a fair trial is if this is not a fair trial," the Prime Minister said in response to a question during an interview with Bloomberg news service.

The interview was held after he opened Bloomberg Malaysia's new office at the Petronas Twin Towers here on Saturday. Part of the interview was aired by Bloomberg today.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether he felt "a sense of relief" at not having to testify at the trial of his former deputy.

"I thought it will be good for me to testify. I wanted to testify. They (Anwar's lawyers) asked me questions and asked me to write the answers. I feel that nothing I write would be adequate. I have to speak in the court itself and explain what actually happened because one of the questions relates to how I became convinced (of what was alleged to have been done by Anwar). That is a long process (which) you can't write it down on paper," he said.

Anwar, 51, is facing four charges of corrupt practice with using his position to interfere in police investigations into allegations of sexual misconduct against him.

He is also facing five charges of sodomy and another charge of corrupt practice by interfering in an investigation by the Anti-Corruption Agency into his private secretary, Mohd Azmin Ali.

When asked whether the results of the just-concluded Sabah election would influence the decision on when the general elections would be held, Dr Mahathir said it was natural for people to expect that the results would play a prominent role on the general election date.

"I don't think it will have that much influence on the general election... but people's perceptions are such that they like to take things as a kind of test for Malaysia," he said.

The general election was last held in 1995 and is due by April next year.

Asked how he sees himself in future as he is 73 now and has been in power for 18 years, Dr Mahathir said that he had planned to retire last year but could not do so as "my deputy (Anwar) has let me down".

"But I'm looking forward to retiring as soon as I've carried out my responsibilities and put things right before handing over to my successor," he said.

When asked whether he had international public relations problems, Dr Mahathir replied: "We hope that Bloomberg will help solve that problem."

-- BERNAMA

RA YBY