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New panel to probe assault on Anwar (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - An independent commission of inquiry headed by former Chief Judge of Malaya Tan Sri Anuar Zainal Abidin has been set up to investigate the alleged police assault on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim while in their custody.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the commission would take over investigations from the police with immediate effect.

"With the formation of the commission, the police will stop all investigations (into the alleged assault)," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference at the Prime Minister's Department today. He had earlier chaired the weekly Cabinet meeting.

The other members of the commission are former Court of Appeal judge Datuk Mahadev Shankar, Pantai Medical Centre's consultant orthopaedic surgeon Datuk Dr Yeoh Poh Hong and former Attorney-General Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman.

Dr Mahathir said Abu Talib would lead the inquiries into the allegations.

However, he said there was no timeframe set for the commission to complete its investigations.

He hoped the commission would be able to complete its investigations as soon as possible.

"It will have to get to the bottom of it," he said, adding that it would have to determine who assaulted Anwar.

It is learnt that the commission would submit its findings directly to Attorney-General Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah.

The setting up of the commission followed the revelation by Mohtar on Jan 5 that police officers had caused some of the injuries suffered by Anwar when he was in their custody.

Various political parties and non-governmental organisations had then urged the Government to set up an independent inquiry to ensure a thorough and fair investigation was carried out to punish those responsible for the crime.

On Jan 8, two days after Mohtar's revelation, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor resigned saying he took responsibility for the alleged police assault on Anwar.

Mohtar, who had ordered the Special Investigation Team to carry out deeper investigations, said he had on Dec 30 ordered ACP Mat Zain Ibrahim, who headed the team, to interview Rahim and several senior officers whose statements had not been recorded.

The others are the Deputy Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai (now acting IGP), Director of Internal Security and Public Order Datuk Mohd Ghazali @ Fauzi Yacub, Federal police Director of Management Datuk Mohd Jamil Johari, Federal Criminal Investigations Department Director Datuk Yaacob Mohd Amin, Special Branch Director Datuk Yusof Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur police chief Datuk Kamaruddin Ali, Deputy Director of CID Datuk Ramli Yusoff and Police Special Force commander Datuk Meor Chek Hussien Mahayuddin.

"The Royal Malaysian Police is fully responsible for the injuries to the complainant (Anwar) while he was in the legal custody of the police," Mohtar had said.

Mohtar had said his opinion was based on the medical reports and the team's investigation file which were submitted to him.

Nevertheless, he said, the investigation carried out so far had not identified the person or persons responsible for the injuries.

Anwar, who is facing five charges of corrupt practices and five of having unnatural sex, lodged a police report on Sept 27 last year claiming he was assaulted by the police. He was arrested on Sept 20 for disrupting public order and later placed under the Internal Security Act.

Anwar appeared in court with a black eye on Sept 29 claiming he was assaulted by the police.

Dr Mahathir, then Home Minister, had ordered the probe into Anwar's injuries and had repeatedly said that those responsible for causing them, if any, would be dealt with according to the law.

Tonight, at a Hari Raya party organised by Federal Territory Umno, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Government would not interfere with the commission's work.

"We will not have any role in its work as we want the commission to be really independent," he said.

The Government would leave it to the commission to determine how it would go about its work such as establishing its secretariat and recruiting its staff.

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