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Mahathir-Umno (Anwar)

NO CONSPIRACY TO OUST ANWAR BUT HE TRIED TO TOPPLE ME- DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 18 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he never conspired to oust Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim through allegations that his former deputy committed sodomy.

The Prime Minister said it was the former Finance Minister who took advantage of the economic meltdown to topple him by worsening the economic situation by implementing what the foreign media called "Virtual IMF."

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno President, said this before 2,034 delegates to the 53rd Umno General Assembly at the Dewan Merdeka, Putra World Trade Centre in his most candid statement ever on the expulsion of Anwar from the party and government in September last year.

"Accusations that I conspired to overthrow Datuk Seri Anwar are nonsense. I never conspired against anyone including against other former Deputy Prime Ministers, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and other Umno leaders who fell out or were dropped. On the contrary I became a victim of a conspiracy to topple me," Dr Mahathir said.

"To conspire like what I have been accused of is not something that is easy to carry out in secrecy as this would involve many people," said Dr Mahathir when referring to Anwar's claims that the 10 corruption and sodomy charges against him were fabricated in a high-level conspiracy to end his political career.

Anwar is now serving a six-year sentence after being convicted of abuse of power in obstructing police investigations into complaints of sexual misconduct against him.

"I have to get cooperation from many police officers, prosecuting officers including public prosecutors, many judges, many men and women who became Datuk Seri Anwar's victims, all Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers, all Supreme Council members and many others who have to be in the know if this conspiracy is to succeed," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who had also once before explained the circumstances leading to Anwar's expulsion, to the Umno General Assembly, said it was impossible for this so called conspiracy not to have become public knowledge months before Datuk Seri Anwar was sacked.

"In Malaysia where secrets are hard to keep, where poison pen letters and the Internet are common, to hide a plot involving lots of people comprising drivers, certain women, high ranking police officers, the Public Prosecutors Department and the Judiciary is impossible."

He said conspiracies could not happen immediately and such a large conspiracy would surely be exposed and spread widely months before anything took place because conspiracies took a long time to plan and to obtain the cooperation of many who must be involved.

"But until the day Anwar was expelled there was no news on the Prime Minister and Umno President working to stop Datuk Seri Anwar from becoming Prime Minister," Dr Mahathir said.

He said on the other hand it was public knowledge that he named Anwar as his successor until the moment before he was expelled.

"Because of the belief that Datuk Seri Anwar will succeed me many officers, Menteri Besar and party leaders at all levels did not dare question any actions or orders made by Datuk Seri Anwar."

"All were afraid of becoming victimised when Datuk Seri Anwar becomes Prime Minister."

Dr Mahathir's explanation was greeted by loud applause from the

delegates and observers present.

Dr Mahathir said confusion and lack of belief in the accusations against the former Deputy Prime Minister were understandable.

He said he himself did not believe when a report (from the police) on the former Deputy Prime Minister's misdemeanours were reported to him in 1993.

The Prime Minister said he also did not believe what Ummi Hafilda and Azizan Abu Bakar had written to him about Anwar's unnatural acts.

(Umami is the younger sister of Anwar's former private secretary Mohamed Azmin Ali who alleged that Azmin's wife Shamsidar Taharin, had a secret relationship with Anwar. Azizan is the former driver of Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, who claimed he was a victim of Anwar's sexual misconduct).

"I felt relieved when police told me Umami Hafilda and Azizan had retracted their accusations. When asked by reporters, I said the accusations were mala fide and aimed at preventing Datuk Seri Anwar from succeeding me."

"Umno Supreme Council members can verify that I continued to support the Deputy President as my heir. I found it extremely hard to believe that my deputy, friend and colleague can be involved in what he was accused of."

"I only believed the truth of the allegations against Datuk Seri Anwar when the police after preliminary investigations on the book 50 Reasons Why Anwar Cannot Become PM, subsequent to the police report he made himself, reported to me there was some truth in the allegations."

"The police gave a clear explanation. I could no longer reject the allegations against Datuk Seri Anwar. But to convince myself that there were no ill intentions by anyone against Datuk Seri Anwar, I called a few people mentioned in the report for me to interview."

Dr Mahathir said that if he who had obtained the proof and explanation from the police then could doubt the truth of the allegations against Anwar what more those who merely obtained the news through newspapers or explanations from other people.

"What more when Datuk Seri Anwar replied to the charges by claiming that all of it was a political conspiracy to prevent his appointment as Prime Minister," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that his former Deputy used his position as Finance Minister to implement the "Virtual IMF" (International Monetary Fund) concept when the country was in the midst of the economic meltdown but as the Cabinet was not aware of his agenda "we did not question him nor did we obstruct the approach he was taking."

The former Deputy Prime Minister increased interest on loans, reduced credit, shortened the period for loans to be declared non-performing from six months to three and withdrew money lent to banks when the Cabinet had directed that banks' statutory reserves be reduced to increase liquidity.

The Government Budget was reduced by 21 per cent and with that the government's development plans had to be shelved. Bumiputera contractors especially and other contractors could not secure anymore contracts while awarded contracts were terminated. They and their suppliers had no more business or income.

Dr Mahathir said with these actions, the economic problems became worse and foreign observers predicted that Malaysia would request for IMF aid and accept its conditions and approach to overcome the problems -- an approach which the IMF itself had admitted had aggravated the economies of countries attacked by currency rogues.

"But we were still not suspicious of the former Deputy Prime Minister," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the former Deputy Prime Minister had hoped that if the

economy deteriorated, the Government would be blamed by the people particularly by delegates to the 1998 Umno General Assembly then the Umno President would step down.

"Didn't the President give an undertaking that he would step down if he had no more support particularly from Umno at its General Assembly," he said.

"Unfortunately for this strategist, the 1998 Umno General Assembly did not show opposition to the President even though at the assembly then Umno Youth Chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi openly accused the Government of nepotism, cronyism and so on."

"The delegates clearly rallied behind the President. This show of support made the President stay on. With this, the attempt to topple the Umno leadership to allow the Number Two to take over failed," Dr Mahathir said.

At the same time, the Government concentrated all its resources to save the economy but Anwar could not focus on this effort due to the circulation of the book "50 Reasons Why Anwar could not become PM."

He said when the police began their probe into the book, Anwar became worried and asked the Home Minister to stop the police from continuing with their investigations but the Home Minister even though was vested with certain powers, was excluded of the power to stop investigations against anyone.

Dr Mahathir also said it was not he who brought Anwar to court but his former deputy was prosecuted following police investigations and he did not have the power to stop investigations against anyone.

He said Anwar tried to obtain an injunction against the circulation of the book although he was advised against stopping the distribution of the book and finally lodged a police report and asked police to ban the book's distribution.

The police could not ban the circulation of the book prior to determining the authenticity of the allegations and when police interrogated several people whose names were mentioned in the book, Anwar asked the Home Minister to direct the police to stop the investigations, he said.

"If a Minister or the Prime Minister has the power to stop the investigations, surely many supporters and families of Umno leaders would ask for investigation against certain people to be stopped," he said.

He said many Umno leaders including Ministers, Chief Ministers and Menteri Besar had been investigated, even charged in court and prosecuted and had been sentenced even to death.

"..In this country as had always been stressed by the former Deputy Prime Minister we have the Rule of Law," he said.

Dr Mahathir who on this occasion used the word "I" instead of "We" as in previous policy addresses at Umno General Assemblies, devoted the greater part of his two-hour 15-minute speech to explaining the Anwar issue.

The Prime Minister also recalled the actions Anwar resorted to after his expulsion.

He said Anwar tried to undermine Malaysia's stability, incited the people to demonstrate and riot in the streets in the hope of toppling the elected government as had happened in other countries with the help of the foreign media and a certain foreign leader.

"The prospective colonialists and their puppets in Malaysia are still trying to weaken this country. Umno is the only defence of this country's sovereignty. Malaysia can only be recolonised over Umno's dead body," he said.

"Unfortunately it cannot be denied that the allegations against the

former Deputy Prime Minister are difficult to accept. As someone who appears to be pious, who can pass of as an Imam and who delivers sermons, is he capable of despicable acts as charged in court?"

Dr Mahathir said Anwar was expelled on moral grounds even though it would be easier to accuse Anwar of trying to topple him.

"Umno members or moreover the Malays will more easily accept the reason that he was expelled because he was not thankful and was ungrateful to the person who did good to him. However I did not resort to that because it was not my intention to oust him. He was expelled because of what he actually did."

"I did not victimise him, I did not conspire to prevent him from becoming Umno President and Prime Minister of Malaysia. It his morals and behaviour which prevented him from becoming Umno President and remaining as a Umno member."

In an earnest tone, Dr Mahathir said, "Although at that time he was my colleague and friend but the interests of the Malays and country prevented me from closing my eyes and allowing something bad to happen to the Malays and the country. If I were to allow that to happen I would have betrayed my race, religion and country."

"I would rather be condemned, cursed, criticised and ridiculed so long as I know in my heart and God Almighty knows that I did not betray my religion, race and country that I have sworn to defend and protect."

Dr Mahathir said the fate that befell Anwar was very tragic and very sad but in Umno's history several senior leaders had experienced a similar fate but unlike Anwar they accepted their fate and did not resort to action that could destroy the party and discredit the country.

He said initially, he felt that the action against Anwar was a bit harsh but after seeing his deeds following his expulsion the move to expel him was thought to be correct.

-- BERNAMA  
ZKS RON AAM