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Panel has 14 days to complete probe into assault on ex-DPM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Cabinet has given the independent commission of inquiry, which was set up yesterday, 14 days to complete its investigations into the alleged police assault on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Sources said today the commission would have to submit its report to the Government within the two-week period from the day it commenced investigations.

They said the Cabinet made the decision because it did not want further delays in determining who was responsible for injuries sustained by Anwar while in police custody.

The police took far too long to investigate the matter and did not even establish who the guilty party was or how Anwar sustained the injuries, they added.

The sources said the Government decided to set up the commission not because it came under mounting pressure from the various groups, but because it was equally anxious as others to punish the guilty ones.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar is expected to present appointment letters to members of the commission soon.

The commission is headed by former Chief Justice of Malaya Tan Sri Anuar Zainal Abidin. The other members are former Court of Appeal judge Datuk Mahadev Shankar and Pantai Medical Centre's consultant orthopaedic surgeon Datuk Dr Yeoh Poh Hong while former Attorney-General Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman will lead the inquiry.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced the appointment of the members of the commission, saying the King had been informed about it.

Abu Talib, when met at his office at Menara Tan & Tan in Jalan Tun Razak, today said: "All I can say is, I have to get ready to discharge the duties I have been appointed to do.

"I have to sit down and have a look at things in greater detail, as whatever I know about the case right now is from the newspapers."

Abu Talib, who is now the chairman of Tan & Tan Development Bhd, said he had not received his terms of reference or letter of appointment.

He also declined to comment on whether he had been contacted by the members of the commission, or when he expected it to begin operations.

"It is inescapable that I would require the fullest co-operation and understanding of the police, the Attorney-General and his officers and Datuk Seri Anwar, to get to the bottom of the incident, in order to enable us to assist the commission to fully investigate the matter and bring to end this episode of the black eye."

On whether the inquiry would be open to the public, he said: "Well, it is a matter of great public interest so it might seem desirable to have an open inquiry, but there again it is a matter for the commission to consider."

Dr Mahathir had stated the commission would take over investigations from the police who would from now stop their investigations into the matter.

"It will have to get to the bottom of it," Dr Mahathir had said when asked whether the commission would have to determine who assaulted Anwar.

Attorney-General Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah, in welcoming the setting up of the commission, said in a statement today he would consider all evidence

adduced by both the commission and the police's Special Investigation Team to determine whether there was a prima facie evidence to warrant the prosecution of any person or any offence under any relevant law.

He said although he had directed the Special Police Investigation Team headed by ACP Mat Zain Ibrahim to complete its investigations by recording statements from the relevant doctors and nine senior police officers, it has not re-submitted the investigation papers.

In his statement on Jan 5, Mohtar said he had ordered the investigation team to record statements from the senior officers whose statements had not been taken.

They were the then Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor, 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 setting up of the commission followed Mohtar's Jan 5 revelation that police officers had caused some of the injuries suffered by Anwar when he was in their custody.

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

On Jan 8, Rahim resigned as IGP, assuming responsibility for the alleged police assault on Anwar.

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 investigation into Anwar's injuries and had repeatedly said that those responsible for causing them would be dealt with according to the law.

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