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Mahathir-defamation

PM SAYS HE'S PREPARED TO FACE ANWAR'S DEFAMATION SUIT

By: Yong Soo Heong

DAVOS, Jan 31 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is prepared to face the defamation suit brought against him by former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"If it is within the law to sue me, then he can sue me. I am ready to face the action against me," he told a news conference, here, Saturday.

Dr Mahathir, who is here to attend the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, said he would also be available as a witness in the court case involving Anwar "if it is within their (the lawyers) right to question me."

Anwar has filed a RM100 million defamation suit against Dr Mahathir and his lawyers have expressed their intention to call the prime minister as a defence witness in his ongoing trial on four charges of corrupt practice.

The Kuala Lumpur High Court called for Anwar's defence on the four charges yesterday after ruling that the prosecution had made out a prima case against him. The defence will start on Feb 8.

Referring to demonstrations taking place in support of Anwar, Dr Mahathir said the country could not accept demonstrations as a means to prevent someone from being tried in court if he was alleged to have done something against the law.

Stressing that Malaysia practised the rule of law and that everyone was equal before the law, he said some people talked of the rule of law but apparently "they do not like the rule of law when that law is used against their own people."

He said that even if someone who was the prime minister or deputy prime minister had committed something against the law, the law would also apply to the person concerned.

Referring to allegations that Malaysia was not democratic, Dr Mahathir said: "As far as democracy is concerned, we have elections regularly. The government is an elected government.

"What is happening now is that there is an attempt to use undemocratic means like street demonstrations to overthrow the elected government," he said.

In an apparent reference to US Vice-President Al Gore's remarks at the Apec Business Advisory Council (Abac) dinner in Kuala Lumpur last November, the prime minister said: "I cannot understand how Democrats can come to our country and urge people in the country to demonstrate in the streets and overthrow an elected government.

"I don't know whether that is democratic or elections properly conducted are democratic."

Dr Mahathir, when asked why the government was wary of demonstrations, said repeated street violence in a neighbouring Southeast Asian country had brought down its government.

"Unfortunately in Malaysia, some people think that if they they can have similar demonstrations, then they can overthrow the government. It (demonstration) was not just an expression of opinion because they can express their opinion anywhere."

Dr Mahathir said that after Anwar was removed from office, he went round the country and addressed thousands of people.

"To say that Malaysians cannot talk and express their views is sheer nonsense," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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