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## Questions posed over alleged poisoning of Anwar

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - As Government leaders questioned the alleged arsenic poisoning of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the Opposition called for a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the matter.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was baffled that Anwar had not sought immediate treatment following his alleged poisoning.

"What's baffling is that he took a long time after obtaining the report (on the urine sample) to raise the matter in court.

"If someone is being poisoned, I believe he will not hesitate to seek treatment (when he knows about it). But Anwar waited 14 days before taking action.

"If I know I have been poisoned, I will act immediately ... seek treatment to rid my body of the poison, take medicine and so on."

The urine was sent to the Gribbles Pathology Laboratory in Melbourne on Aug 18. The results were received on Aug 26 and released yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on Anwar's allegation yesterday that he had been poisoned after a sample of his urine showed a high level of arsenic.

The Prime Minister had earlier addressed a gathering of Federal Territory Barisan Nasional leaders and members at Menara PGRM.

Dr Mahathir said this was the first time that someone had accused the Government of attempted murder. He said it was not the Malaysian way to kill people because of their political leaning.

"This is not part of our country's culture. No one has been murdered because of his political stand."

Dr Mahathir said no one on trial had been permitted to eat in the courthouse but Anwar was allowed that besides speaking to reporters.

Asked why Anwar was given such special treatment, the Prime Minister said: "That I do not know ... probably they were afraid that the world will say we are not just ... we will be pressured ... you must know there are foreign reporters ... and they always ask help from foreigners."

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is in Auckland for the Seventh Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation leaders' summit, questioned the two-week delay in releasing the results of the urine test.

"It looks like there is a hidden agenda (muslihat) in the manner in which the issue was made public," he told reporters.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who is also at the summit, questioned whether Anwar's lawyers had an ulterior motive in making the allegation just before the start of the Apec meeting.

"We are very amazed and surprised as to why an incident which occurred on Aug 26 was only given attention by Anwar's side and his lawyers when Apec commences, where in New Zealand the world media have converged, world leaders have converged, world non-governmental organisations have converged," she said.

"Is there a political motive? I was very surprised when asked late yesterday evening by the media over the report that Anwar Ibrahim had been taken to hospital and that excessive arsenic level was found in his body."

She said the alleged poisoning made it look as if the Government wanted "to get rid of him, not only from the political scene, but also from this world".

"Logically, if Anwar really suffered from stomach-aches and diarrhoea due to offending elements in his food, why was this not disclosed on the

very day itself?"

Gerakan vice-president Dr S. Vijayaratnam said if it was proven that it was being done deliberately, then those responsible must be brought to justice.

Dr Vijayaratnam, however, said it should also be considered if the whole thing could be a fabrication to gain sympathy.

"If this is the case, then it is definitely done with mischievous intent to discredit the Government, and must be condemned," he said in a statement.

Opposition party leaders, meanwhile, called for the establishment of an independent panel of inquiry or Royal Commission to ascertain why there was such an excessive level of arsenic in Anwar's urine sample.

DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang said Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai should formally propose to the Prime Minister and his deputy that a Royal Commission of Inquiry be established in the case.

DAP deputy chairman Karpal Singh urged the Government to set up an inquiry to ensure justice was done in the matter.

He claimed the poisoning was a political conspiracy by those in "high places" out to destroy Anwar.

"We are not pointing fingers at anyone. However, we urge that an independent Royal Commission of Inquiry be set up to ensure justice is done," he told reporters outside Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia after visiting Anwar.

He said preliminary tests at the hospital had shown that the arsenic content in Anwar's body was almost 77 per cent more than the normal level.

However, the hospital could not be contacted to verify this.

Parti Keadilan Nasional deputy president Dr Chandra Muzaffar said the independent panel should comprise medical and legal experts and respected members of the public.

Parti Rakyat Malaysia president Dr Syed Husin Ali said since Anwar had been hospitalised, a Royal Commission should be urgently formed if the new tests confirmed the Melbourne result.

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