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Dr M: Don't interfere (HL)

LANGKAWI, Sun. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told other countries, in no uncertain terms, not to interfere with Malaysia's domestic affairs.

The Prime Minister said it was also "not right" for other countries to question Malaysia's judicial system.

"Do not interfere in Malaysia's affairs. Other countries should not make allegations that our Judiciary is not good," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the judicial system of some of the countries which had attacked Malaysia's Judiciary could also be questioned.

"The US is the same ... we see how a black man was severely beaten up ... the policemen (involved) were freed (by the court)."

(On March 3, 1991, black motorist Rodney King was severely assaulted allegedly by four Los Angeles police officers, but an all-white jury cleared them of the charges. After pressure and riots by the blacks, two of the policemen were retried and sentenced to 2 1/2 years' jail on Aug 25, 1993.)

Dr Mahathir said there were countries which also had no regard for the sovereignty of other countries.

He cited the case of former Panama President Manuel Noriega who was brought back (on Jan 23, 1990) to the US to face trial (for drug trafficking).

"This has never been done by any country in the world," he said.

He was asked on Malaysia's move in sending protest notes to countries which had attacked its Judiciary in its handling of the criminal cases against Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said this after closing the Organisation of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers (Bakti) Piala Perdana 2000 badminton competition at the Langkawi Development Authority sports complex here.

Asked on Malaysia's stand on the attacks and whether the statements made by these countries could affect bilateral relations, Dr Mahathir said:

"We know these people ... we know who are our friends and who are our enemies".

Among those who had issued statements questioning the country's Judiciary, saying that it was being controlled by the Executive over the verdict of Anwar's recent case were the US State Department and Vice-President Al Gore, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the European Nations.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim also hit out at the big powers for allegedly trying to police the judicial system of other countries.

He said under the concept of "International Recognition of Judicial Process", foreign leaders generally could not criticise the judicial system of other nations.

Responding to the big powers' criticism of the way Anwar's sodomy trial was conducted and his conviction, Rais said they did not take into account the fact that other Malaysian Ministers, too, had been sentenced by the courts before.

"Menteris Besar have been sentenced to jail ... State exco members here have to undergo the same process, no different from what Anwar went through," he told reporters after visiting the Langkawi magistrate's court.

Rais, according to a Bernama report, said the judicial system of a

country should be respected by others. He added that this should be so even if the decisions were not acceptable to them.

He pointed out that Singapore went ahead with its decision to cane and imprison an American teenager, Michael Fay, for vandalising cars even though US President Bill Clinton had requested Singapore not to carry out the sentence.

"That should be the way with all cases, including that of Anwar's, as each country has the right to practise its own system."

In Muar, Johor, Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said today foreign diplomats in Kuala Lumpur should be summoned and briefed on why their countries should not interfere in Malaysia's affairs.

This would enable the Ambassadors and High Commissioners to tell their leaders to respect and understand the principle of non-interference and to refrain from expressing doubts over Malaysia's Judiciary and culture.

Muhyiddin, who is also the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister, said:

"Their representatives in Malaysia should go back to their own countries and tell their leaders to stop all allegations.

"We do not want them to teach us how to run our country."

Muhyiddin said those countries criticising Malaysia had in fact not practised what they preached, such as on human rights.

Yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi criticised international leaders who expressed doubts about Malaysia's Judiciary over the verdict in Anwar's trial.

He stated that they should respect the principle of non-interference and refrain from commenting on Malaysia's Judiciary and culture.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar had also criticised several foreign countries for interfering in Malaysia's domestic affairs following Anwar's guilty verdict.

In Kota Baru, several non-governmental organisations today commended the Foreign Ministry over its firmness in handling foreign interference in Malaysia's judicial system.

Chairman of the Bar Council Criminal Law Committee Mohd Apandi Ali said it was enshrined in the UN Charter that one member nation could not interfere in the internal affairs of another member nation.

"The judicial system is an internal matter of a country.

"Hence, foreign comment on the Malaysian judicial system goes against the UN Charter," he said when contacted here.

Mohd Apandi said Malaysia had never interfered in the internal affairs of any country, particularly in the judicial system of other nations.

President of the Ex-Servicemen's Association of Malaysia Datuk Muhammad Ghani said Malaysia had its own judicial system which merited respect from all countries including the big powers.

Other countries should not interfere in the judicial and legal system of sovereign and independent nations, he said.

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