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Seven congressmen ignorant of Malaysian law, says Dr Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today American congressmen who wanted a retrial for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim were ignorant of Malaysian law.

He said they did not seem to know that he, as Prime Minister, had no power to order a retrial or dismissal of the charges against Anwar.

He said Malaysia could not be bothered to respond officially.

"The rule of law doesn't permit the Prime Minister or Government to order a retrial. If they (Anwar's supporters) want one, look in the law books and see when it is permitted. But you go and ask other countries to pressure for a retrial.

"I can't say I am not satisfied and order a retrial ... That means I should sack all the judges if I have no confidence in them," he told reporters after launching the Rida-Mara golden anniversary celebrations.

He was commenting on the move by seven members of the US House of Representatives to file a resolution calling on Malaysia to dismiss all charges against Anwar or hold a retrial.

According to Parti Keadilan Nasional president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, a movement headed by one of her top lieutenants was responsible for lobbying the US congressmen.

She had said that the Free Anwar Campaign movement was in charge of such matters.

The FAC secretariat director is Keadilan media coordinator Raja Petra Kamarudin.

Dr Mahathir said he was ashamed of Malaysians who asked foreigners to threaten their own country. "If we are not happy, there are channels within the country, there are elections."

He said during the 1999 general election, the Opposition used pictures of Anwar's black eye to get sympathy, but Malaysians supported the Barisan Nasional.

He added that Keadilan only wanted "to sell" the country and should stop calling itself Keadilan (justice) as it did not understand the word.

The Prime Minister felt sorry for the United States as its congressmen did not understand the law, adding that they were not fit to be congressmen in the world's most powerful country.

Asked to comment on the possibility of Al Gore becoming US president, he said it would be "difficult" for Malaysia to have good relations with the United States.

He said Gore had displayed extremely bad manners when he came to Malaysia in 1998 for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting, and called on Malaysians to rise up against the Government.

Asked about the Government's call on Malaysians to master English, he said this did not mean neglecting Bahasa Malaysia, rather it was a call to master two languages.

He said English was vital as most knowledge was written in that language, adding that trying to translate everything into Bahasa Malaysia was too slow.

Asked if the Government would grant citizenship to children of Malaysian women who married foreigners, he said it was a universal law that the children's nationality followed that of their father.

He said the Government now allowed foreign spouses to work and after sometime would grant them permanent resident status and later citizenship.

Their children, if below a certain age, will also become Malaysians.

He said the Government would consider the matter, but did not think that those who had lived abroad from birth to death could consider themselves Malaysians.

On yesterday's Middle East truce accord, he said the Israelis were not sincere in wanting peace, adding that it was unacceptable for Israel to order its soldiers to open fire on people who were only armed with stones.

Speaking about the Organisation of Islamic Conference, which he will attend later this month, he said they would try to forge better unity.

Dr Mahathir, however, added that he was not hopeful as it was difficult to get Islamic countries to act together.

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