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All Malaysians equal before the law, says Dr M

PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - While his jailed ex-deputy appeals against a criminal conviction he claims was politically motivated, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the case shows that all Malaysians are equal before the law.

Dr Mahathir, in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press yesterday, said the alternative to not putting Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim on trial would have been to bury the case.

Anwar was fired during the Asian economic crisis in 1998 and later charged with sodomy and corruption, convicted in separate trials and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Anwar claims he was a victim of a conspiracy to prevent him from posing a challenge to Dr Mahathir. Mahathir has denied the allegations.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar had not been imprisoned under the Internal Security Act, which allows for indefinite detention without trial and was recently used to lock up 24 suspects allegedly involved with an al-Qaeda linked group which plotted to bomb US targets in Singapore.

"If we put him under detention without trial, then we would be accused of taking action that is not compatible with modern practices. If you put him on trial, you say that the court is biased.

"Then the only other thing we can do is not to take action, on the basis of his being a very important person. Yet we want to uphold the idea of everyone being equal before the law. I think this is being better understood," he said. - AP

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