

## **Mahathir sidesteps demand to back Anwar's freedom**

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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad last night sidestepped urgings for him to seek the release of jailed former opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim through the Citizens' Declaration movement.

Speaking at a Pakatan Harapan forum in Shah Alam on the Public Accounts Committee's 1MDB report, Mahathir said to include the demand to release Anwar would only split the movement.

"If we were to decide on Anwar and this or that, we will be split apart.

"We must unite for one goal only. In any struggle, the strategy is to reduce your enemy and increase your friends," he told the audience of over 1,000 people.

"We must have rational thinking based on careful consideration. If we follow our desires, believe me, we will not succeed," he added.

Also on the panel were DAP veteran Lim Kit Siang, DAP national publicity chief Tony Pua, PKR secretary-general Rafizi Ramli, Amanah information chief Khalid Samad, and anti-corruption watchdog C4 executive director Cynthia Gabriel.

Mahathir was responding during the question-and-answer session, when someone in the audience stood up and demanded Mahathir to also make a call for Anwar's release from his Sungai Buloh prison cell.

Mahathir's former deputy is currently serving a five-year jail sentence for sodomy, a charge which he said was politically motivated.

The Anwar supporter also asked Mahathir to declare that what the former premier had done to Anwar in 1998 was wrong.

On Monday, Mahathir was quoted in an interview with The Australian as saying that he believes Anwar is now too old to be the next prime minister.

He had also said he stood by the decision to sack his ex-deputy in 1998, saying the latter was "immoral".

In response, Anwar's wife PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail had said: "I regret Dr Mahathir should choose to continue to express rancour and venom against Anwar Ibrahim. This persists despite Anwar's magnanimity in forgiving Mahathir's previous excesses."

Another man in the audience had quoted Mahathir's own words that "Umno is now rotten to the core" and as such, he said any new prime minister from that party would be equally as bad.

He said Mahathir should, as such, seek for removal of not only Najib but the entire Barisan Nasional administration.

Mahathir, meanwhile, reiterated his stand that no reform or change can be done while Najib remains as prime minister.

"Our view is that Najib must be removed first and everything else can follow later," he insisted.

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