

## **"He is drunk with power"**

**www.time.com**

**Nov. 16, 1998**

While Malaysia thrived, few complained about Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's authoritarian inclinations. But the Asian economic downturn has thrown his tactics into new focus. He has come under heavy criticism for his treatment of Anwar Ibrahim, his reformist former deputy, who now sits in Sungai Buloh prison accused of sexual improprieties and corruption, charges Anwar and others in the opposition say are trumped up. President Clinton, who visits Malaysia next week, will avoid meeting Mahathir, partly in response to Anwar's detention. This interview, in which Anwar, pictured at right, responded to written questions, was smuggled out to TIME.

TIME: How are you holding up?

Anwar: I am in prison not because of being convicted of any crime but simply because I'm denied bail, which is most unique and unprecedented in Malaysian legal history. I'm extremely fine, as [good as one] can possibly be in prison--busy with prayers, devouring books, strategizing reformasi [the reform movement], avoiding the indolence of prison life.

TIME: What was your interrogation like?

Anwar: Solitary confinement needs no description. They did not issue any threats. Initially the interrogators were adamant in wanting me to enlighten them on reformasi. I challenged them to write down my statement. I proceeded to mention the billions amassed by [Malaysian officials]. They realized that they had stirred the hornet's nest and changed the proceedings into friendly conversations.

TIME: Tell us about the beating.

Anwar: Shortly after being brought to the police cell, blindfolded and handcuffed, I was severely beaten on the head, neck and face, rendering me somewhat unconscious till morning. I gathered information later from police officers that the direct involvement of the police top brass cannot be excluded. Dr. Mahathir was monitoring developments by the minute.

TIME: Have your attitudes changed toward the PM and the government?

Anwar: My perception of his leadership is that he is drunk with power, lost all sense of rationality and sanity. He has no qualms about using all instruments of government, the police and the judiciary to serve his ends.

TIME: Are you a homosexual?

Anwar: Definitely not. This is nothing but vile character assassination to prevent me from becoming PM. I've produced evidence to prove a high-level conspiracy against me. The allegations include all forms of sexual misconduct, corruption, treason, complicity in a murder and other heinous crimes. Ultimately I will be vindicated. Insyah Allah [God willing].

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