

Anwar defends Dr M's right to attack Government

NST-30/6/2006

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has defended Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's right to attack the Government, and appealed to the media not to censor his views.

The former deputy prime minister, who was detained under the Internal Security Act in 1998 and later jailed for abuse of power, said a media blackout on his former boss would be unwise.

"It makes a mockery of the system. If Dr Mahathir did something wrong during his rule, for us to repeat it would not be right," Anwar told a Press conference at his house here yesterday, wryly noting that it took some effort on his part to defend Dr Mahathir's right to free speech.

Anwar said the media space initially given to Dr Mahathir was an exception to the rule,

because when the former premier was seen transgressing the barrier set by the mainstream media, they began to bar him.

"When a minister chose to criticise Tun Mahathir, he was given full coverage. But when Tun Mahathir rebutted his criticism, there was no adequate coverage," he said.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri

Nazri Aziz launched a blistering attack on Dr Mahathir for sharing the same platform with opposition politicians who had called him a "pharaoh" when he was prime minister.

At a gathering attended by opposition politicians and non-governmental organisations on Saturday, Dr Mahathir repeated criticisms that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ah-

mad Badawi had betrayed him by reversing some of his policies.

On senior Pas leaders who attended the gathering, Anwar, who is also Parti Keadilan Rakyat adviser, defended the Islamist party.

Although he said he was not supportive of such a move, he was informed by Pas leaders that some of them attended the talk with Dr Mahathi-

merely to listen to the former prime minister lambast Umno.

Among the invited guests were Pas deputy president Nasharuddin Mat Isa, vice-president Husam Musa and central committee member Mahfuz Omar.

Asked if he would consider working with Dr Mahathir to oppose the Government, Anwar said: "Of course not."