

Dr M: It was unanimous

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BELOW is a question and answer session with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad after the Umno supreme council meeting ended early this morning. Dr Mahathir: I would like to announce that the Umno supreme council had its meeting with almost all members present including Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as the deputy president.

The meeting discussed only one thing that is the problems pertaining to the deputy president.

I explained the matter to the supreme council and why it needs to take suitable action based on what had been reported to me.

After I spoke, Datuk Seri Anwar was given full opportunity to explain the problems raised from his viewpoint and to defend himself against the allegations made against him.

He was allowed to talk for as long as he wanted and after that, the supreme council members gave their views.

Almost all supreme council members gave their views and, generally, they were of the opinion that Datuk Seri Anwar should withdraw from Umno and if he did not, he would be expelled as a party member.

When everyone who wanted to say something had expressed their opinions, Datuk Seri Anwar

was given the opportunity to state his stand.

He said he was not willing to withdraw from the party and instead he would accept whatever decision made by the supreme council.

After that, he left the meeting and I made one last explanation and asked the supreme council to decide whether we should have a secret or open ballot.

The supreme council was of the opinion that we decide by consensus.

The decision was a unanimous one that Datuk Seri Anwar be expelled from Umno.

Tonight the situation is a bit extraordinary as all supreme council members stayed behind for the press conference.

This is to state the stand of the supreme council that it is a stand through consensus, that all members, supported the decision made.

Q: Why was the decision made and what was the explanation?

Dr M: We do not need to give explanations on this matter but this is the decision made by the supreme council after discussing the problem.

Q: Don't you think the public deserves to know the reasons behind the decision to sack Anwar as Deputy Prime Minister as it is unprecedented?

A: It has nothing to do with the Government.

This is a party problem. We had discussed it at length. We made a decision. I do not have to explain the reasons we came to the decision as it is according to the discretion of the supreme council members.

Q: Did the party find Anwar guilty?

A: We are not a court. We did not announce a sentence. We are merely looking after our own party and with our decision, if he should be expelled

Q: What about the principle of one being innocent until proven guilty?

A: It's not new for us because on previous occasions, people who are under investigation, being charged or had done something that had not been compatible, they have been asked to withdraw even when they were found not guilty by the court.

Q: Why was he sacked from the Government?

A: We find him not suitable, that's all. In other countries, ministers are sacked every now and again but in Malaysia, because we don't sack them often, people feel it is unnatural. But sometimes when it is not compatible, we do not want the services

Q: Anwar has alleged high level conspiracy?

A: That is his right, to make allegations. He has to prove it. I think he may

have the opportunity at a proper forum.

Q: Now there is some anxiety, how are you going to address the problem?

A: I am sure Umno leaders will be able to pacify the people by explaining the decision made by the supreme council. The supreme council made a unanimous decision and we represent all Umno members and those who sympathise with Umno. With that, I am sure they will think that surely the supreme council will not make a unanimous decision if there are no specific reasons.

For the time being I will be the Acting Minister of Finance.

Q: (What about Anwar's position as an MP?)

A: He's still a Member of Parliament. We have no right to expel him from his parliamentary constituency.

Q: Does not mean that he is an independent MP?

A: I think so.

Q: How do you think Umno members will react? Will there be factions?

A: I think Umno members will be *gawat* (unsettled) but finally they will be calm again. There's no faction.

Q: Will there be anymore shocking measures after this?

A: Ha, Ha. Shocking? I don't know. I think I've provided a lot of news for

you.

Q: Anwar has expressed his fear that he will be charged under ISA, OSA?

A: I don't know about that but as he has reported today to the police 'they must do an investigation and if there is anything to warrant taking action and I'm sure the authorities will take the right (act).

Q: Three deputy prime ministers and deputy presidents had come and gone. What do you make of it?

A: It's just an accident of nature. I don't know.

When I became prime minister and president I never thought I would last three years. But there you are, these things happened.

Q: It is implied that you don't need a deputy?

A: Well, it's hard work. But now I have an additional burden to become Minister of Finance. Not very good actually. The foreign mess always says that I don't understand finance at all. But I'll try.

Q: How will the deputy president's post be filled up?

A: Well, we are having elections next year and unless we amend the constitution, there will be elections 'the next year. It will be left vacant and I don't think I should pre-empt this by appointing another deputy prime minister.

Q: How do you personally feel about this because

Anwar was seen as your heir apparent?

A: Well, I must say I'm saddened by this. I wish it hadn't happened. Personally I wish it had not happened, certainly not at this point of time when the country is facing a terrible economic problem and we need to stand together and solve this problem. But this thing has gone out of my control. I don't have any say.

Q: Any impact on the Commonwealth Games?

A: I don't think so.

Q: The opposition parties will make this an election issue?

A: We will face anything. We are a political party and when we have an election, there will be issues which did not exist. Issues will be created. So that is not something unexpected. We will face all.

Q: When you say you do not want to pre-empt the appointment of a deputy prime minister and deputy president, are you saying you are not going to appoint a deputy prime minister until the next party election?

A: Most likely I won't. But I need a minister of finance. I'm only an acting minister of finance, I hope I can find somebody willing.

Q: Is your number two spot jinxed?

A: I'm not superstitious.