

ANWAR

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EXPULSION

54.9.98

Deputy president post to remain vacant until next party poll:

By SHAMSUL AKMAR and
WAN HAMIDIHAMID

KUALA LUMPUR: The Umno supreme council has unanimously expelled deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as a party member less than 48 hours after he was sacked from the Cabinet.

His expulsion was announced by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who said the post of Umno deputy president would remain vacant until next year's party elections.

The Prime Minister said he would act as finance minister and that he would not likely fill the post of deputy prime minister.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar was sacked because "we find him not suitable, that's all. I do not have to give any reasons as it is a party decision."

"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," he told reporters at 12.50am today at the end of the council's four-hour meeting.

The 51-year-old Anwar, who had been sacked as deputy prime minister and finance minister on Wednesday, turned up at the meeting at Menara Dato Onn at 8.35pm while about 900 of his supporters waited outside.

He left the meeting 15 minutes

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before it ended following which Dr Mahathir asked council members if they wanted an open or a secret vote.

"They said they would go by consensus. And the consensus is Anwar has to be sacked as an Umno member," he said.

He said all supreme council members present at the meeting were also given the opportunity to express their views before the vote was taken.

With that decision, Dr Mahathir said, Anwar was now the independent Member of Parliament for Permatang Pau.

"We are not a court. We did not pass a sentence. We are merely looking after our own party and we decided he should be expelled," said Dr Mahathir when asked if the party found Anwar guilty.

Dr Mahathir said the decision was made after Anwar was given ample time to defend himself against allegations levelled at him.

Asked how he had outlasted three deputies, Dr Mahathir replied: "It is an accident of nature. Now, I have the additional burden as the Minister of Finance."

On how he felt about sacking Anwar, he said: "I am saddened by it. I wish it had not happened when the country is facing economic problems."

Party secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said under the party constitution, Anwar could only appeal to be reinstated as a member after three years.

Anwar told his supporters outside Menara Dato Onn that he would fight on despite the party decision to expel him.

He said Dr Mahathir started off the meeting with a proposal to expel him from the party.

Anwar said he replied by saying that he was not prepared to leave the party and instead presented his case.

"I left it to the supreme council to decide but I do not expect the members to vote against Dr Mahathir's proposal," he said.

Urging the supporters to make way for the Prime Minister when he left the hall, Anwar said they should however make their stand known to him in a respectful manner.

"Please remain calm and do not give them more excuses to lengthen my punishment," he said.

The supporters, however, booed the supreme council members when they came out from the PWTC to get into their cars.

Policemen then stepped in to control the crowd.