

MORAL ISSUE

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Mahathir: I'm convinced Anwar is not qualified to lead the country

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was sacked because of his "low morals."

The Prime Minister said that from his own investigations he was convinced that Anwar was not qualified to lead the country.

He said there was no political conspiracy which led to the decision to sack Anwar as Deputy Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Umno deputy president.

Dr Mahathir said the expulsion had nothing to do with politics or differences over economic policies.

He said: "What I know is sufficient to tell me that he's not suitable. I don't think politics came into the matter except that he is no longer suitable to be the leader of a country.

"As far as his belief that it is because he is challenging me, I feel I can defend myself.

"I feel I have sufficient support."

Speaking to reporters after briefing Umno leaders from all party levels at the Putra World Trade Centre, the Umno president also rejected accusa-

tions that Anwar was removed due to differences over the country's economic management.

"Even if he differs with me (over economic policies), I feel quite sure that I can bring him around to accept my views and my way of doing things and it is normal.

"But the allegations (against Anwar) about the other things, those we cannot accept. I cannot accept, my party cannot accept and the country cannot accept them."

Asked if there was any possibility of Anwar being reinstated, Dr Mahathir said: "No, no, not a hope, I think."

He said Anwar had denied all the allegations, saying they were all lies.

"To him, there is a whole lot of people conspiring to bring him down.

"He's almost paranoid about such a thing. I don't see how we can have senior government officers, courts, judges, prosecutors and a whole lot of ordinary people acting in collusion when these people do not know each other at all."

Asked if he would explain the issue to Malaysians at large, Dr Mahathir said he felt there was no need to do so.

"I think that over time, they will

Reforms 'simply to divert attention'

● FROM PAGE ONE

understand that what I have said is based on facts.

"I do not do this to a person who has been literally brought up by me, to succeed me, my friend.

"I would like to do that to my enemies," he said.

Dr Mahathir explained that he did not choose his friends nor did he choose an accusation that was not only difficult to explain but also hard for the masses to accept.

"His (Anwar's) credentials as a religious man are very good. I should have found some other excuse but, unfortunately, there aren't any," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he did not disclose details because he disliked

painting a bad picture of anyone.

Asked if he ever regretted "bringing up" Anwar, Dr Mahathir said:

"Ever, I do not know. But I am sorry that it has to come to this. I was thinking of retiring this year. I went off last year to give him a chance to lead the country and if not for these economic problems, I would have stepped down.

(Dr Mahathir went on leave for two months last year, leaving Anwar to run the country.)

"Unfortunately, I think I need to stay back to lend some of my experience for the resolution of these (economic) problems."

At an earlier function, Dr Mahathir said he had doubts over Anwar's reformation movement,

reports FOO YEE PING.

"I don't think the rakyat want someone with such low morals," he said, adding that Anwar's calls for reforms were to mislead the people and to divert attention from the accusations against him.

On whether the Government was concerned about Anwar gaining sympathy from university students, Dr Mahathir said the people should volunteer their support willingly.

"When you pick up students for support and for moral courage, then I think you're almost bankrupt," he said in response to questions about Anwar's reformasi calls after addressing the Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management biennial conference in Bangi.

Dr Mahathir said there were no restrictions on Anwar's movements.

"He's moving around. He's doing his best to force the Government to arrest him so that he'll become a martyr."

This would lead to the foreign press labelling us an authoritarian government, he added.

On whether tensions between him and Anwar would lead to disorder in the country, he replied:

"No, I don't think so ... Malaysians are generally peaceful people."

Dr Mahathir said Umno had acted previously against many party leaders "merely on suspicions that they had not behaved properly."

They were removed from the party even before they were convicted in court, he added.

● TURN TO PAGE THREE