

09/09/1998

Anwar removed on moral grounds, says Dr M

DATUK Seri Anwar Ibrahim was removed from the Cabinet and expelled by Umno last week on moral grounds, not because of economic or political differences, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

Speaking to reporters after briefing Umno representatives of Umno divisions and branches in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, he said the police had conducted investigations into allegations against Anwar and he too had looked into the matter.

"I did my own investigations and I am convinced... (concluding that) he (Anwar) is not qualified to lead the country," he said.

"It is not because of differences over politics or the economy... his character does not qualify him to become a leader of the country," he said, stressing that there was no high-level political conspiracy as claimed by Anwar.

"I explained (to Umno leaders and members) the events which occurred and how finally I concluded that there was substance to the allegations," Dr Mahathir added.

He however would not disclose details, saying "it is not a pleasant thing".

"I am sorry that it has come to this... I was thinking of retiring this year ... I went off (for a vacation overseas) last year to give him (Anwar) the chance to lead the country," he said.

"If not for the economic problems... I would have stepped down but unfortunately, I think I need to stay back to lend some of my experience to solve the problems."

Responding to a question from a foreign journalist regarding Anwar's allegations of a conspiracy, Dr Mahathir said: "I can't say... I don't know... what I know is sufficient to tell me that he is no longer suitable to be a leader in this country."

On the suggestion that Anwar was removed because he might vie for the president's post in the Umno elections next year, Dr Mahathir said it was baseless. "I can defend myself."

It was also not because of differences over economic management. Even if there had been, "I am quite sure I could bring him around to accept my views and my way of thinking".

It is the "allegations about the other things (moral issues) that bothered me... I cannot accept that... this country cannot accept."

On whether there is a chance for Anwar to be reinstated in his Government and party posts, Dr Mahathir said: "No, not a hope."

Asked if Anwar would be arrested, he said: "That is not my problem. It's up to the (law enforcement) authorities... but he (Anwar) has been courting arrest, and preferably under the ISA (Internal Security Act) so that he will be regarded as a martyr ... certainly it will give him a lot of publicity."

Asked if he intends to explain the decision to the public, he said: "I don't think I need to ... over time they will understand (the decision was) based on facts."

Earlier, speaking to reporters after opening the Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management Biennial Conference in Bangi, Dr Mahathir said the Government has no plans to appoint an acting deputy prime minister.

He also ruled out bringing next year's party elections forward.

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