

05/09/1998

Anwar revives reform agenda but undecided on next move

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today a reform movement has started in the country, thus reviving an agenda which surfaced in the run-up to the June Umno General Assembly.

"I can sense the sentiments," he told a Press conference at his Bukit Damansara residence.

Anwar said he had not decided his next political move but was working with all organisations associated with reform. He added that opposition party leaders had either telephoned him or visited him at home.

"Fadzil (Datuk Fadzil Noor, Pas president) was here, so was Dr Syed Husin Ali (Parti Rakyat Malaysia president), and (those from) Suaram.

"(Lim) Kit Siang (DAP secretary-general) phoned twice and spoke to my wife (Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail)."

In the run-up to the June Umno General Assembly, Anwar and several Umno leaders, aligned to him, had raised the issue of reform.

Anwar later clarified that his suggestion at the Johor Umno Convention that there should be a reformation in the country, did not mean that he wanted to challenge Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Anwar had said that his statement was misinterpreted, especially by the foreign media.

Today, the former Umno deputy president said there had been a spontaneous display of support among the people, adding that this was evident by the support conveyed to him by many at the Saidina Omar mosque where he attended Friday prayers earlier.

"Even housewives came to see me at the house. They are appalled by the attempt to smear me," he said, adding that these women were contacting others to form a sort of "housewives network".

Asked whether he would form a new party or join any of the existing ones, Anwar said no decision had been made as yet and that he was "consulting friends".

On his links with the student movement, he said their intelligence should not be underestimated as they were capable of making their own decisions.

"When I was a student leader, I did not consult any political leader. We decide on our own."

Anwar said he planned to conduct a nationwide tour to explain to the people in order to counter the charges against him.

"This will be done as soon as possible. Although there are threats of me being arrested, we are prepared.

"I will go down to the people. I will not get buses of people to pay to attend."

Asked on his expulsion from Umno, Anwar said the supreme council had "totally disregarded the procedures".

"I have not been charged, neither have I been given notice (on the offences)."

Asked about Dr Mahathir taking over the Finance Ministry, Anwar said: "I wish him good luck but I have cleared most of the files."

Dr Wan Azizah, who was seated beside Anwar, was asked whether she believed any of the allegations involving sexual impropriety levelled against her husband.

"It is baseless. I believe totally in my husband's innocence. This is not a politically-correct statement because I really believe it. It is not

just the I-stand-by-my-man stuff...I really believe him.

"I married him for the man he is and for what he stands for," she said.

After attending Friday prayers, Anwar spoke to some of the congregation who had stayed behind.

"I believe the real strength lies with the people and not with a few top leaders and the rich."

Some of the people who had prayed at the mosque followed Anwar as he walked the short distance back to his house. At one point, Anwar was hoisted by his supporters.

On reaching his residence, Anwar told the crowd that the "struggle will continue". The crowd soon dispersed.

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