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Anwar sacked for 'moral misconduct' (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told Umno leaders today that he was compelled to remove Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the Cabinet and initiated his expulsion from Umno because of moral misconduct.

Breaking his silence over Anwar's dismissal last Wednesday and expulsion from Umno a day later, the Prime Minister made it clear there was no conspiracy involved.

Instead, said Dr Mahathir, what he discovered of Anwar's character did not qualify him to be a leader of an Islamic country like Malaysia.

Speaking to reporters after briefing representatives of Umno divisions and branches at the Putra World Trade Centre, the Prime Minister said he was convinced that the allegations of moral misconduct against Anwar were true.

"The police carried its own investigations. I did my own investigations and I am convinced," he said.

Four affidavits which were filed at the High Court on Thursday, among other things, implicated Anwar in sexual misconduct including sodomy with a man, illicit sex and seducing a businessman's wife.

Some of the encounters were alleged to have been facilitated by Magnum Corporation Bhd public affairs director Datuk S. Nallakaruppan.

However, Nallakaruppan in a Press statement issued through his lawyer yesterday denied involvement with Anwar and the charges against the former Deputy Prime Minister.

Nallakaruppan, Anwar's regular tennis partner, was charged with unlawful possession of 125 rounds of live FIOCCHI ammunition.

Divisional Youth and Wanita wings also attended the briefing which was held to enable the party president to explain to grassroots leaders the reasons behind Anwar's removal and expulsion.

Elaborating why the moral issue was the biggest reason for the action, Dr Mahathir said he explained to the representatives the reasons that helped convince him of the numerous allegations made against the former deputy president.

"I was convinced and I concluded that he was not qualified to lead the country. It was not due to whatever differences he had with me over political or economic matters, but because his character does not qualify him to be a leader of a country like Malaysia."

The Prime Minister said the actions against Anwar were also not triggered by the possibility of Anwar challenging him as Umno president in next year's party polls. "I can defend myself," Dr Mahathir said.

On when he found out that Anwar was not suitable for public office, Dr Mahathir said when the allegations surfaced last year, he did not believe them, thinking this was a plot to oust his deputy.

However, he concluded recently that Anwar was not suited to succeed him as the evidence implicating him was now very clear.

Asked whether he disclosed details of Anwar's wrongdoings at the briefing, he said this was not done as "it is not a pleasant thing to do".

To another question involving the moral issue against Anwar, Dr Mahathir said although the last thing the nation needed now was a political crisis, he had no other way of avoiding the actions.

Asked whether his former deputy had made any confession during the discussions that they had, the party president said Anwar admitted that he

was a normal human being and did what human beings did.

"But he denied what was alleged. But (at that time) I wasn't holding an inquiry. I just asked him as a friend."

The Dewan Merdeka was packed with party members well before Dr Mahathir arrived. Delegates who emerged from the closed-door briefing said they could feel the "agony" Dr Mahathir went through as he explained the reasons behind last week's events.

The delegates said Umno Youth leader Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi was conspicuously absent from the briefing. Dr Mahathir, who was asked by reporters why Zahid - under pressure by Youth leaders to resign honourably - was absent, said the Youth leader was indisposed.

The delegates also said Dr Mahathir was given a standing ovation at the end of the briefing.

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