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Anwar to go on tour to explain

Lokman Mansor

DATUK Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who has been removed from his Government posts and expelled from Umno amid allegations of official and sexual misconduct, will go on a nationwide tour to explain his side of the story to the people.

Speaking at a press conference at his house in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Anwar said he will do so "as soon as possible".

"This is a waiting game. I am prepared. I will go down to the people. I will not get busloads of people to be paid to attend," he said.

Anwar said there is a major reform movement in the country which began even before he was sacked as deputy prime minister and finance minister.

"You can see the results, for example, in the parliamentary by-election in Arau (which Barisan Nasional lost to Pas). Although people don't feel that we are entirely to be blamed for the current economic problems, some have the view that the entire blame is only on the West or other forces," he said.

Anwar said he views positively the concern and support from certain Umno branches and division leaders, Members of Parliament, opposition leaders, various religious organisations, and student leaders.

"I think this is something quite spontaneous, and I would certainly suggest we discuss areas or issues, particularly in the light of initiating reforms in this country," he added.

Anwar said he is prepared to work with all organisations and parties committed to reform, be it Umno, BN component parties, opposition parties and more importantly, the rakyat.

Asked whether he would form a new party or join any of the existing ones, Anwar said no decision has 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 decided on our own.

Anwar said for the moment he is preoccupied with looking at how to deal with the allegations made against him and the possibility that he may be charged.

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."

Anwar has dismissed allegations of sexual and official misconduct as a high-level conspiracy involving certain leaders in Umno and wealthy businessmen.

When asked how she feels about these allegations, Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail said they are baseless.

"I believe totally in my husband's innocence. This is not a politically correct statement. I really believe, alright? It is not based on 'Stand By Your Man' kind of stuff. I really, really believe. I married him for the man he is and for what he stands for," she added.

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," he said.

Later in the afternoon, Anwar told reporters he is confident that his supporters will remain calm despite his expulsion from Umno.

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