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Anwar `was removed to safeguard integrity'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said it would be an embarrassment to the party and Government if one of its senior officials was being investigated for alleged sexual improprieties.

Abdullah, who is also Foreign Minister, said the allegations of moral misconduct against former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim must be viewed seriously in view of his high profile in Government.

"The party wouldn't like investigations to be carried out on the holder of a senior post," he said when asked to comment on Anwar's expulsion.

Anwar had repeatedly told the crowd at his Bukit Damansara house that "if police investigations into the allegations were still underway, why was he removed from the Cabinet and expelled from Umno".

Abdullah also said Anwar should not question the prerogative of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to sack him from the Cabinet.

Wanita Umno head Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said the action was taken to safeguard the party's image and integrity.

"Because of his position, the allegations against him have the potential to compromise national security and harm the party," she said after the opening of Expo Niaga Wanita '98.

Anwar was also advised by another former Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Ghafar Baba, to take his so-called reform movement to the ballot box instead of the streets where it could trigger trouble.

Ghafar said Anwar must specify which areas he wanted to reform since Umno itself is a major reform movement which has brought much success to the country.

"It has been a reform movement since its formation in 1946. In the past, the people did not mind being ruled by others but Umno changed that," he said.

Meanwhile, the Ampang Jaya Umno division has denied involvement in the distribution of leaflets supporting Anwar in the constituency yesterday.

Its deputy chairman Ismail Kijo said the leaflets, which bore the division's name, were believed to have been distributed at several mosques after Friday prayers.

"All 131 Umno branches in Ampang Jaya support Dr Mahathir's actions in removing Anwar," he said.

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