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'Behaviour of Anwar's supporters unbecoming'

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Cabinet Ministers and Menteri Besar today unanimously criticised Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's supporters for their unruly and rowdy behaviour following his arrest last night.

They said their behaviour was unbecoming and appealed to the public to remain calm and not to listen to rumours.

They also said the Government would take firm action to control the situation should it get out of hand.

They were particularly critical of the crowd which was unruly while gathering outside the High Court and Sessions Court in Jalan Raja this morning which forced the police to fire tear gas to disperse them.

The crowd, mainly youths, had gathered as Anwar was initially expected to be charged in court today.

Yesterday, Anwar was at two illegal assemblies, one at the National Mosque and the other at Dataran Merdeka. He spoke to the crowd at the mosque and marched to the Dataran Merdeka.

Two groups of his supporters left the Dataran later and made their way to Menara Datuk Onn where the Umno headquarters is located. They then marched towards Sri Perdana, the Prime Minister's residence, through Jalan Mahameru.

By 8.45pm, they had gathered about one kilometre away from the road leading to Dr Mahathir's house. Many were carrying placards and shouting. As the crowd became unruly, Federal Reserve Unit members were forced to fire tear gas to disperse them.

Among those who criticised the action were Umno vice-president and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, Perak Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib, Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Samad and Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar.

Others like MCA president and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Gerakan president and Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon also expressed their displeasure at the development.

The leaders also took Anwar to task for inciting the people at the two illegal assemblies.

"This is a very irresponsible action. Should the nation's political stability be jeopardised just because Anwar is dissatisfied over his dismissal from the government and Umno," asked Abdullah.

Both Ramli and deputy chairman of the Penang Umno Liaison Committee Datuk Mohd Shariff Omar said Anwar had gone overboard in testing the Government's tolerance.

"He has been courting arrest since his removal from the Cabinet and expulsion from the party. Yesterday's incident was the final straw," Ramli said.

In defending the action against Anwar, Isa said he was willing to travel nationwide to explain why Anwar was removed from the Cabinet and expelled from Umno.

Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob described the two illegal assemblies as a "planned provocative act by a desperate man."

He said in a statement that Anwar went ahead with the two assemblies despite knowing that his supporters could get out of control.

The leaders are urging Malaysians to remain calm. Abu Hassan said as

justice and the truth would eventually prevail, the people, especially Anwar's supporters, must be calm and patient.

Dr Ling said the instigators should not get the innocent people into trouble.

"The people must remember that the country should always stay peaceful and let the law take its course," Dr Ling said.

He added that many of Anwar's supporters were merely curious and wanted to catch a glimpse of Anwar.

"When the truth prevails, it will fade away," he said.

Gerakan's Dr Lim said now that Anwar has been arrested, he has the chance to fight his case in the court.

Lim said the people should let the law take its course and the reason for Anwar's removal would be made public through the legal course.

"We now better understand the action taken by the Prime Minister. Although it is his prerogative (to remove Anwar), he has his reasons to do so.

"And over the days, when things have been proven in the court, people will understand further," he said.

Lim said the about-turn of Anwar's attitude to the Prime Minister and other issues "makes us believe that Anwar is no more rational".

"And in his haste and commitment to defend himself, he does not mind breaking the law and creating chaos in the country. In this respect, we must not respond to that," Lim said.

Koh said that public safety was paramount and had to be addressed to ensure that stability and peace in the country is maintained.

He said in a democratic country such as Malaysia, anyone was free to express their views, but their action should not be to the extent that public safety was threatened.

Deputy Transport Minister Datuk Ali Rustam agreed with the action taken by police in arresting Anwar for the sake of public safety.

He said: "Anwar has broken the law by holding assemblies without a permit and for breaking the peace. I hope the public will abide by the law and not follow Anwar's group."

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