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Leaders express support for decision

THE removal of any government functionary does not constitute political instability, International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said yesterday.

She was commenting on the removal of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as the deputy prime minister and finance minister by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Wednesday.

She said, "One man does not make a government, not only in Malaysia but elsewhere in the world. Top leaders not only leave but die. We have to put in that perspective."

The Minister added, "I remember when Datuk Musa Hitam left the government, I was asked the same question.

"The rest of the Government is still here and the whole political set up as well. If people look at political stability as not being assigned to one person, they will get it right."

When asked if the current political developments will affect trade and investment since political stability has been Malaysia's selling point, Rafidah said Dr Mahathir's conviction is to get the economy moving.

"I know that his conviction is that there is no point for us to be popular if the country we are leading is going to the dogs. It is of no benefit to anybody. The country matters more.

"All the other things that come along the way should be dealt with separately and objectively. It should not in any way disturb what we want for the country. We have wasted enough time... and many companies have gone under.

"Even in the newspapers, advertisements are diminishing. Other things seem so unimportant," Rafidah said in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Rafidah explained that the latest developments will not affect foreign direct investment flows because people who invest for valid reasons and they know that leadership does not lie in an individual.

"We have to put things in perspective. If I were to put my money in a country, I would want to see that political stability is translated not into how popular one man or one woman is, but how the whole government functions.

"Malaysia has a track record of a government that is reliable, a civil service that is efficient and supportive of private sector efforts, local or foreign. This combination has been very good for us.

"It may not be a perfect environment but it is regarded as one that is very conducive for business. They know that we have not enough workers, sometimes there is water shortage, party squabbles ... but people who come from countries whose governments are hanging by a single thread, for those who come from this countries ... Malaysia is seven heaven."

When asked if any more shocking measures were to be introduced, Rafidah said: "This is shocking enough. But remember that from time to time, we have to see what the circumstances are. As time goes on, there will be other measures but it will be for flexibility for traders ... making business recover better. That will be the trend now."

Meanwhile, Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said Dr Mahathir has good reasons and had thought the matter through before taking the decision to dismiss his deputy.

Sabbaruddin, who is also Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister, said Dr Mahathir is not a person who makes decision hastily.

He said Dr Mahathir hathir, in his capacity as the Prime Minister, has the right to appoint or dismiss the deputy prime minister, ministers and parliamentary and political secretaries.

On the response from party members, he said so far the feedback has been supportive of Dr Mahathir's decision.

"I don't know, maybe because I am the secretary-general, they say they are supportive," he told reporters after announcing the Shopping Carnival '98 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"No matter how right an action taken maybe, it will not receive total support from the 2.7 million party members," he said, when asked whether Anwar's dismissal will create disunity among Umno members.

Sabbaruddin regards the event as a phase which party members will have to go through.

He said the members have gone through similar phases where former deputy prime ministers, Tan Sri Musa Hitam and Tun Ghaffar Baba, resigned from their posts. "This may be another phase that we will go through," he added.

On another question, he said as Temerloh Umno leader, he can guarantee the support from Umno members in his division for Dr Mahathir's decision.

Meanwhile, Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek said it is the prerogative of the prime minister in the Constitution to appoint or dismiss any ministers or his deputy.

Lim, who is also MCA deputy president, said he is sure that Dr Mahathir had a very good reason for making his decision.

"For nine years I've worked under him, I haven't known him doing anything unless he has a good reason ... we must trust the Prime Minister," he told reporters during the visit at a construction site in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Umno Youth Penang, however, has described the action taken against former Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as unjust.

"A person is innocent until he is proven guilty. What has Anwar done that he deserves to be fired as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister?" he told reporters after Anwar's press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"We support the Prime Minister. He is still the Prime Minister and president of the party. Loyalty is still there. But we dislike the act, we disapprove of the act," he said.

Abdul Rahim said Anwar commands grassroots support, and echoed the former deputy prime minister's appeal that the people should remain calm.

"But this does not mean the grassroots should stop there. They should be able to come out and say an injustice act has been done to the former deputy prime minister," he said.

Abdul Rahim said the conspiracy against Anwar stems from those trying to control the distribution of wealth in society.

"You see, when the cake shrinks people compete for a shrinking cake. There is not too much there to share. If there is not too much there to share, I believe some people just want the cake for themselves. This is a conspiracy to make sure that the distribution of rewards in society is controlled by a few and that is why they have to make sure Anwar is out."

Bernama reports: Barisan Nasional (BN) Youth has reiterated its loyalty to Prime Minister and BN chairman Dr Mahathir and fully supports his efforts to ensure political and economic stability in the country, its head Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said yesterday.

The BN Youth urged all groups to remain calm and be united in facing the current situation, he said after chairing a meeting of the BN Youth Movement at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) in Kuala Lumpur.

The BN Youth viewed with "serious concern" the latest developments in the country's leadership particularly the issue concerning Anwar.

Asked to elaborate on what he meant by "serious concern",, Zahid said the political situation before this development was calm but the BN Youth viewed the latest turn of events as "serious developments".

"We feel that this is serious because we are not in a position to analyse and interpret the situation at the moment," he said.

On Anwar, Zahid said the BN Youth was confident that justice and the truth would prevail "and if there is anything that will be brought we hope the due process of the law will prevail".

Meanwhile, BN secretary-general Datuk Seri Mohamed Rahmat said yesterday that Anwar's removal will not affect the Barisan Nasional solidarity,

"The dismissal will not have an adverse effect on the BN and I believe that BN component parties will understand and accept the decision taken by Dr Mahathir," he said.

"The BN has faced various trials and challenges in the past and from my experience they have not affected the BN solidarity," the Information Minister said at Angkasapuri after witnessing the signing of an agreement naming RTM as the host broadcaster of the 16th Commonwealth Games.

Kedah Umno, meanwhile, has expressed support for Dr Mahathir's move to dismiss Anwar as his deputy and finance minister.

Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid who is also Kedah Umno Chief said Umno members had high discipline and always supported the actions of the Government and the party.

Everyone was now waiting for the reasons for his removal from the Cabinet, the Menteri Besar told reporters after chairing a meeting of the State Executive Council in Alor Star yesterday.

Dr Mahathir is the head of the Kubang Pasu Umno Division in Kedah.

"I am confident that when the reasons for the removal are made known everyone will accept the decision as reasonable," he said.

Asked whether the dismissal would damage Umno unity, Sanusi who is a member of the Umno Supreme Council, said the matter had nothing to do with unity.

In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok said the dismissal of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from his government posts has come as a big surprise to Sabah.

"Everybody still does not know the full background of the removal," he said.

"I think what has happened has come as a big surprise to all of us, and of course at the moment we do not know the full background of this turn of events," he said after opening a seminar on effective economic management policies and strategies.

Dompok said this when asked by reporters to comment on the removal of Anwar as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday.

Dompok also said that what was important now was for the national leadership and the people to give the country solidarity to face the current economic problems.

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