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More leaders urge citizens to support Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - More Umno leaders came forward today to urge the people to rally round Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Government, saying that the removal of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from all Government positions and his expulsion from the party were necessary for the good of the nation.

They said the people should understand that Umno took such a drastic action as the party had enough information to justify his expulsion.

In Kuala Terengganu, party information chief Datuk Dr Yusof Nor said the Umno supreme council's unanimous decision to expel Anwar from the party was to safeguard the dignity and honour of Umno.

"Umno was not acting like a court and meting out punishment when it expelled Anwar, but was merely safeguarding its members and ensuring that they followed Islamic teachings," he said.

He added that Umno would mount a nationwide campaign to explain Anwar's expulsion from the party to prevent confusion among members.

"Umno initially did not entertain talk about Anwar's scandal, thinking it was fabrication and a result of envy," he said.

He said Dr Mahathir previously had confidence in Anwar and on numerous occasions had said that Anwar would be his successor.

"Unfortunately in the midst of this, the Prime Minister was faced with statements and disclosures which he found difficult to ignore.

"In order to safeguard the image of the party, race and country, he had to act with great reluctance against his deputy whom he had trusted," he said, adding that the party had no choice but to take a firm stand on the issue.

In Rembau, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad urged the people to rally round the Government and to continue their support and efforts to develop the country.

Mohamad Isa called upon the people, especially Umno members, to remain calm and patient in regards to any issue related to the action taken against Anwar.

"The public should not take the law into their own hands but instead have full confidence in the country's leadership," he said.

He said Anwar's decision to establish a reform movement in the country was his right.

In Alor Star, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid said the Government would take all necessary steps to correct any misconception that might arise from Anwar's removal.

He said Umno leaders would also explain reasons behind the actions taken against Anwar.

"Many people may be shocked and confused after recent developments concerning Anwar and this is a normal reaction.

"However, I believe the people will have greater understanding of the whole matter once the truth starts coming out ... in the end the truth will prevail," he said.

Asked if recent political developments would affect the upcoming KL Commonwealth Games, Sanusi said: "I don't think athletes would run any slower just because Anwar is no longer the Deputy Prime Minister."

In Banting, State Umno liaison committee chairman Datuk Abu Hassan Omar said he had directed all 17 Selangor Umno division heads as well as Youth and Wanita chiefs to explain to members, the reasons behind Anwar's

removal.

He issued the directive last night after chairing an two-hour meeting with all Umno divisional heads, Youth and Wanita leaders and State Assemblymen.

The directive, Abu Hassan said, was given because he did not want people to get wrong information.

"Even though the electronic and print media have been giving a clear picture of the situation and the reasons behind expulsion, there might be people especially in kampungs and rural areas who would want to hear it from their leaders," he added.

Meanwhile, Umno supreme council member Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said Anwar's expulsion from the party had nothing to do with politics, economic issues or his relationship with Dr Mahathir.

She said the expulsion and his removal as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister were solely due to problems arising from his alleged misconduct as mentioned in the book 50 Dalil Mengapa Anwar Tidak Boleh Jadi PM (50 Reasons Why Anwar Cannot be Prime Minister).

Rafidah, who is the Minister of International Trade and Industry, said this after signing the minutes of the Kuala Lumpur-Taipah Trade and Investment Meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

She expressed regret over the statements made by Anwar following his removal from the Government, saying they gave the impression of instability in the country.

"Not only can this instil negative feelings among local people, but also have an impact on foreign investors wishing to invest in this country. They may defer their intentions (to invest here)," she said.

Rafidah also hit out at Anwar for allegedly getting university students, youth associations and non-governmental organisations involved in the campaign to defend him.

In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah Umno liaison committee secretary Datuk Yahya Hussin said Anwar's expulsion had no bearing on the solidarity in Sabah Umno.

He said the latest development would also have no effect on the State Barisan Nasional.

"Umno members in Sabah must respect decisions taken by the council and continue giving their full support to the Umno president and Prime Minister," he said.

In Kangar, Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim urged civil servants in the State to accept the realities of the present situation, including the Anwar's removal from the Government.

He said he did not want them to misinterpret what was happening and criticise the Government, especially Dr Mahathir.

"As Government officials and staff, I am sure you can think rationally as the Prime Minister would surely not have acted drastically if the matter was not related to economic problems and national security."

Shahidan urged all civil servants in the State to support Dr Mahathir in his efforts to revive the country's economy.

In Malacca, supreme council member Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam said Anwar's use of the foreign media to defend himself was a show of disrespect to the country's administrative system.

Ali, who is also State Umno liaison deputy chief, described the action as inappropriate and desperate.

The former Umno deputy president had given a 10-minute telephone interview to the CNN yesterday in which he denied the allegations against him.

Ali, who is also Deputy Transport Minister, added such action only showed Anwar's insincerity and displeasure.

"I am sad that he has allowed himself to be used by the foreign media," he said.

Ali also described as "inappropriate", Anwar's action to speak on the issues affecting himself to the congregation at the Saidina Omar Mosque at Bukit Damansara after the Friday prayers yesterday.

Meanwhile, Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa said any action by Anwar to work with anti-government groups or the opposition would be construed as challenging Umno and the Government.

"The people will lose respect for Anwar if he does this," he told about 800 Kemas members at the Risda building here.

He said Anwar should not attack the system and the Government he also led for years, adding that what he was currently facing was more of a personal matter.

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