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More State leaders, ministers support PM's decision

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Several more State-level political entities held special meetings to discuss Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's decision to remove Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the Cabinet yesterday.

At the end of the meetings, they joined several Cabinet Ministers to express support for the Prime Minister's decision.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said what happened was a "sad turn of events".

"Certainly all of us have to understand the reasons. It shows that no one is above the law.

"Where the law applies, it does not matter whether it involves a big or small man," she said after opening the 11th Malaysia-Taiwan Joint Meeting in Seri Kembangan, Selangor.

"But of course there will be some who may not understand. So we have to listen very carefully to what's happening and understand the reason why it's done."

In Durban, South Africa, Umno vice-president and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has described Anwar as a person whom the Prime Minister loved dearly and also a potential successor.

He said Dr Mahathir must have had strong evidence and had weighed things carefully before taking such an action on Anwar.

"The PM loves Anwar but I am sure this does not outweigh his love for the country and the party. It again reflects Dr Mahathir's firmness and principle in dealing with situations," he told Malaysian journalists.

Abdullah, who is Umno vice-president, is leading the Malaysian delegation at the 12th Non-Aligned Movement summit in the South African seaside resort.

He said he was on the telephone with Dr Mahathir early yesterday during which he also expressed support for the Prime Minister's actions.

Seen in this light, Abdullah said he was sure that Malaysians, especially Umno members, would understand the situation.

He said based on the feedback he got so far, there was wide support for Dr Mahathir from the party leaders at the State level.

And this, he noted, gave the indication that party members understood the situation.

Asked about Anwar's statement denying the affair, Abdullah said Anwar was free to say it "but he has to provide proof and I'm sure there is proof against him too".

After all, he added, the action was taken against him after a thorough investigation.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said he was confident that Umno members supported the Prime Minister's decision.

"Dr Mahathir had acted in his capacity as the Prime Minister. Therefore, it is his prerogative to appoint and dismiss people from their post as deputy prime minister, ministers, deputy ministers and political secretaries."

Being the Prime Minister, Sabbaruddin said, Datuk Mahathir would have made the decision after much thought and discussions.

He said even with the bigger problem which arose when Tengku Razaleigh and his supporters left Umno to form Semangat 46, the party's unity was still intact.

"We have gone through so many phases. This is just another phase which we have to go through."

Barisan Nasional secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said he was confident that Anwar's dismissal would not effect the coalition.

This was because the BN's strength was based on the principle of co-operation between the parties and not any one leader.

Furthermore, he said, BN leaders had always supported the leadership of Dr Mahathir and as such, he was confident that they would continue to do so with his (Dr Mahathir's) latest decision.

In Muar, State Umno chief and Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, who chaired an emergency meeting attended by all 20 Umno division heads, said Johor Umno leaders were unanimous in their decision to stand by Dr Mahathir.

He said Johor Umno was of the opinion that the action taken by Dr Mahathir was in the interest of the party and the nation.

"We have decided to collectively pledge our full confidence and support to Dr Mahathir in the handling of this issue," he told reporters after the meeting at the Classic Hotel.

Ghani, who is also Umno Supreme Council member, stressed that no one was above the law and that national leaders must be responsible and accountable to the people for their actions.

He advised Umno members and the rakyat to remain calm to enable Dr Mahathir to deal with the issue.

In Kuching, the Sarawak BN said the dismissal of Anwar as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister was the prerogative of the Prime Minister.

Chief Minister and Sarawak BN leader Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, who chaired a special meeting of the Sarawak BN, also gave his full support to Dr Mahathir in his efforts to implement the National Economic Recovery Plan.

Taib said: "The Sarawak BN also believes, as in the past, that the Prime Minister was acting in the interest of the nation."

In Kuantan, Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob said Dr Mahathir had valid reasons for making the decision.

Khalil, who is also Pahang Umno chief, said he did not foresee any problem in the State as a result of the decision.

In Kota Baru, Wanita Umno agreed with the Prime Minister's decision, its head Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said.

"We agree to the decision of the Prime Minister and will wait for further enlightenment from the Umno Supreme Council on Anwar's position," she told reporters after opening an entrepreneurship course for women.

In Shah Alam, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar called on Umno leaders and members in the State not to over-react on the removal of Anwar.

"Dr Mahathir, who has been the Prime Minister for 17 years, will not sack someone holding a high Cabinet position without concrete evidence."

Abu Hassan said the State Umno backed Dr Mahathir as it strongly felt that whatever measure taken was for the good of the Government and the nation.

In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok said the action taken by Dr Mahathir was for the good of the country and deserved full support from the people.

In Kangar, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim called on the people to respect Dr Mahathir's decision.

"He must have a valid reason," Shahidan, who is also State BN and Umno head, said.

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