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Party leaders agree expulsion necessary

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Umno vice-presidents, State party leaders and supreme council members said the expulsion of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the party was necessary under the circumstances he was in.

They said it was important that Anwar distanced himself from the party because of personal problems that he was facing.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak described the council's decision to sack Anwar from the party as "fair" and "necessary".

Najib said the allegations against the former Deputy Prime Minister and deputy Umno president were serious and extraordinary.

"If he remains in Umno, the party will be unwittingly dragged into the process of court," he said. Dr Mahathir had "strong reasons" to sack Anwar.

Najib was commenting on the decision by the council this morning to expel Anwar as a member of Umno after he refused to resign.

On Anwar's allegations of political conspiracy, Najib said: "One should not attack the very system which one upheld when in Government service. The system has worked well."

Dr Mahathir, when pressed by reporters after the council meeting this morning on why Anwar was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister said, Anwar was unsuitable for the two positions.

In Durban, South Africa, vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the council's decision to expel Anwar was an endorsement of Dr Mahathir's sacking of Anwar as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister.

Abdullah, who is Foreign Minister, was here representing Dr Mahathir at the 12th summit meeting of countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) which ended yesterday.

He said before the NAM meeting, he had written to Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, expressing support for whatever decision the council took relating to Anwar's position in the party.

"The decision is unprecedented (in Umno). But obviously the council members have reasons to come up with such a decision (to expel Anwar).

"What is important now is for Umno members to understand the council's decision. Our task is to explain to Umno members (why the decision was necessary)," he said.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said expulsion of party leaders was not new as even Dr Mahathir had been expelled from the party once.

"The only difference was that he (Dr Mahathir) was not given a chance to defend himself. Datuk Seri Anwar, however, was given the opportunity to defend himself. He was given ample time to speak," he said.

In Kuantan, State Umno chief Tan Sri Mohamad Khalil Yaakob said Anwar's dismissal from the party was appropriate.

"The council's decision last night was in line with the fact that the problem faced by Anwar was not political," he said.

Khalil said Pahang Umno had begun briefing its members on the council's decision through its MPs and leaders.

In Sepang, Selangor Umno chief Datuk Abu Hassan Omar said Anwar's expulsion was done to safeguard the good image of the party.

He said Selangor Umno would render its full support to Dr Mahathir.

Expelling Umno leaders, Abu Hassan said, was not unusual as Umno had in the past expelled or asked those with "problems" to resign.

In Malacca, State Umno liaison deputy chief Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam said the decision to sack Anwar was made for the good of the country and party.

"The issues affecting Anwar must not involve the party. As far as Malacca Umno is concerned, we are sure that the decision will not in any way affect unity and strength of Umno."

Mohd Ali, who is also Deputy Transport Minister, said Malacca Umno stood firmly behind Dr Mahathir and would continue in its efforts to help revive the country's economy.

State Umno Youth chief Nazari Adzim said the movement would continue to support the present leadership.

"Members have been told not to resort to any silly or drastic action that can adversely affect unity and solidarity or face action."

In Ipoh, Perak Umno chief Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib said he would meet Umno division and branch leaders to explain the Umno council's decision to expel Anwar.

He also urged party leaders to support the decision and have faith in Dr Mahathir's leadership.

In Setiu, Wanita Umno chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said the decision made by the council to expel Anwar was done with sincerity and solidarity.

"When the well-being of the party and the country are concerned, we should stand united and support it during trying times. And, Wanita (Umno) supports Dr Mahathir," she said.

Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah said the action to dismiss Anwar had to be taken in the interest of the people and to ensure national security and stability.

In a statement, he said Umno members should not dispute the decision, but support it instead.

Tengku Razaleigh said he believed the events would not have any adverse effect on the integrity of the Government and Umno.

Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin urged the people to accept Anwar's removal from Umno and the Government in the true spirit although it came as a surprise.

"Although we are saddened with his dismissal, as Muslims we should accept the decision as fated."

He said Anwar's expulsion from Umno and his removal from all Government posts would not affect the smooth running of the Commonwealth Games which would begin next Friday.

Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed said it was common for the people to be emotional in the early stage of the sacking.

In Port Dickson, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad said he had briefed all State Assemblymen on Anwar's dismissal to avoid the Opposition from exploiting the situation.

"The decision against Datuk Seri Anwar was done with one voice and was for the good of all," he said after opening a seminar for the hard-core poor here today.

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