

10/09/1998

PM did right to dismiss Anwar, say Umno religious leaders

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Religious leaders in Umno said the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was on strong ground when he decided to remove Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the Government for moral misconduct.

They said removing a leader with loose moral character was demanded by the teachings of the religion.

This, they said, was more so in the case of a leader who professed to be religious and spoke often of morality.

Terengganu Menteri Besar and senior Umno Supreme Council member Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad said Anwar had clearly not practised what he preached on the question of morality.

He said the decision to remove Anwar was essential for the country because if he was allowed to remain in the Cabinet and the party, he might end up as Prime Minister.

"What had happened also contradicted the slogan of leadership by example," said Wan Mokhtar when commenting on party president Dr Mahathir's statement yesterday that he was compelled to remove Anwar from the Cabinet and initiated his expulsion from Umno because of moral misconduct.

Wan Mokhtar said the explanation given by Dr Mahathir to Umno leaders yesterday would be accepted by party members and the people.

Most people were aware of the close relationship between Dr Mahathir and Anwar and would find it hard to believe Dr Mahathir would conspire against his anointed successor.

Wan Mokhtar was speaking to reporters after signing an agreement on the East Coast Highway project concession.

Anwar, in the meantime, rebutted the Prime Minister's explanation saying that he was victim of a conspiracy by Dr Mahathir's inner circle.

Meanwhile, former director-general of Pusat Islam, Datuk Zainal Abidin Abdul Kadir said the removal of Anwar on moral ground was apt in accordance with Islamic principles.

Zainal Abidin, who is a supreme council member, said a leader needed to uphold high integrity and moral values.

"Thus, the Prime Minister made the right decision and this is based on Islamic principles," he said.

Zainal, who is Melor State Assemblyman in Kelantan, said a leader must not only portray exemplary leadership qualities, but must also practise high moral values.

In Penang, Umno veteran and former State Islamic Religious Council chairman Datuk Mohd Yussof Mohd Latiff said Umno leaders must always uphold high integrity.

The 58-year-old former State Assemblyman for Sungai Dua, who was also the 1997 State-level Tokoh Ma'al Hijrah, said this was required in Islam.

"We must always hold the highest level of morality and integrity.

"This is especially so for those who are in the position to lead others, including non-Muslims," he said.

Mohd Yussof, a former Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement or Abim Penang branch chairman, said a person's high regard for integrity and morality must be reflected in action.

"We think well and must always behave well too. We cannot have leaders who pretend to promote virtues but always have bad thoughts," he said.

On the removal of Anwar from the Cabinet and expulsion from Umno, Mohd

Yussof, who is also a former Member of Parliament for Tasek Gelugor, said Anwar should be allowed to defend his innocence in court.

(END)