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Pressure mounting on Zahid

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Pressure is mounting on Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi to relinquish his post if he fails to make an open stand supporting the party's leadership on the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Several State Umno Youth leaders today voiced their support for statements by Federal Territory and Terengganu Umno Youth on Zahid's failure to show a firm stand and his questionable behaviour with regard to the sacking of Anwar.

Until now, Zahid has yet to call for a meeting of the Umno Youth Exco to discuss the movement's official stand.

In Alor Star, State Umno Youth vice-chief Wahab Din said the State Umno Youth regretted Zahid's handling of the issue.

"The Kedah Umno Youth regrets the attitude of our Youth chief, Zahid, in handling the issue which is related to the interest and the dignity of the party and nation.

"It is most inappropriate of Zahid to leave the Youth movement in the lurch by not stating a firm stand on this issue," he said at the State Umno headquarters.

State Umno Youth chief Abdul Halim Said said the State movement unanimously supported the removal of Anwar to salvage the dignity of the party and nation.

He said the decision was reached based on strong evidence and reasons given to the movement.

"We also hope the issue will be settled in court and through the country's judicial process and he (Anwar) will be given justice," he added.

In Kota Baru, Kelantan Umno Youth assistant secretary Ahmad Jazlan Yaakob called on Zahid to relinquish his post if he did not make an open stand supporting the party's leadership.

He said the decision calling for his resignation was reached at a special meeting attended by nine State Youth divisional heads in Kuala Lumpur last night.

He said the nine had expressed regret and questioned Zahid on his silence over the removal of Anwar from the Government and party positions.

Ahmad said the move was taken as the State Umno Youth was dissatisfied with Zahid who had yet to make a stand of supporting the party leadership under party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said Zahid's silence would create confusion among the Youth members.

He said the State Youth movement felt that the issue was a serious matter and it was necessary for the movement's leader to express his undivided support for Dr Mahathir.

"It is necessary for Zahid together with his Youth exco members to make an open stand and give full support to Dr Mahathir.

"If Zahid fails to carry out the responsibility to lead the movement, it is advisable for him to step down honourably from the post in the interests of the movement's unity and the party," he said.

In Johor Baru, Johor Umno Information chief Mohd Khaled Nordin had said this was not a time to play politics but to stand united.

Khaled urged members not to politicise the expulsion of Anwar as this would force members to take sides.

"Instead of going after each other which would lead to a break-up within

Umno, party leaders should take this time to explain to the grassroots the rationale behind the sacking of the former Umno deputy president.

"It is important for members to face facts and accept the sacking calmly and in a mature manner."

In Malacca, State Umno Youth chief Nazari Adzim urged members to be patient until Zahid called for a meeting in a day or two to discuss the movement's stand on the expulsion of Anwar from the party.

"Give Zahid time to call for the meeting. He had just attended the Supreme Council meeting on Friday and I am sure he would call for a meeting of the Youth wing soon.

"There is no need to rush it. There is also no need to make a big fuss over the whole thing. Let Zahid make the decision."

Nazari said it was important that the meeting be held in a calm atmosphere.

In Kuala Lumpur, Barisan Nasional Youth secretary Zulkifli Alwi called on Zahid to make his stand clear once and for all to prevent confusion among members.

Zulkifli, who is also Umno Youth Exco member, also urged Zahid to call for an emergency meeting so that an official stand on the issue could be taken.

"By aligning himself with Datuk Seri Anwar, Zahid is sending a wrong signal which has led the public to assume that Umno Youth is supporting the reformation movement.

"In the absence of an official stand, Zahid must refrain from getting involved in such activities so as not to create confusion and to prevent Umno Youth from being labelled as opposing the Government or the party leadership," he told a Press Conference.

He said even if Zahid and other Umno Youth leaders wanted to be involved with the reformation movement called by Anwar, they must make it clear that they were there in their personal capacity and not as leaders of Umno Youth.

Also present at the Press Conference was another Umno Youth Exco member Zein Isma.

He said by getting involved with the movement, especially after announcing the BN Youth alignment with Dr Mahathir's leadership, Zahid had neglected to carry out his duty as BN and Umno Youth leader.

This, he said, had also rendered untenable his position as a leader.

Zahid, he said, should take note of the disenchantment expressed by the many State Umno Youth leaders over his handling of the matter before the situation became worse.

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