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Two Youth chiefs among 10 expelled (HL)

Ashraf Abdullah; Ramlan Said; Marhalim Abbas

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Two State Umno Youth chiefs - Ruslan Kassim of Negri Sembilan and Abdul Rahim Ghause of Penang - were among 10 members expelled from the party tonight for taking part in anti-Umno activities.

Also expelled were Umno Youth assistant secretary Saifuddin Nasution Ismail and Petaling Jaya Selatan deputy division head Mohamad Ezam Mohd Noor, who is Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's former political secretary.

The decision to sack them was made during a four-and-a-half hour supreme council meeting chaired by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the party headquarters.

The others sacked were Lokman Nor Adam (Sri Gading), Baharuddin Ibrahim (Rasah), Dr Wan Hasni Wan Sulaiman (Pasir Mas) as well as Abdul Shafiq Omar, Mohd Yahya Shafie and Abd Kudus Omar (all Kuala Selangor).

Dr Mahathir told a Press conference that several others, including former Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, were issued with show cause letters as to why they should not be expelled from the party for the same reasons.

He said the council accepted Zahid's resignation and appointed deputy Youth leader Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein as the movement's acting head.

Dr Mahathir said the party's deputy presidency would be left vacant until the party elections next year.

However, he said he would exercise his prerogative on whether to appoint a Deputy Prime Minister.

Asked whether he was close to choosing one, Dr Mahathir said:

"I am not close. I have not made a decision."

He said the matter was, however, discussed in general by the council.

Dr Mahathir said for the time being, a Minister or Ministers would be appointed to carry out routine duties of the Prime Minister when he was not in the country, but stressed that this did not mean that they were being endorsed as candidates for the deputy presidency and Deputy Prime Minister.

He added that the responsibilities of the deputy president would be shared by the vice-presidents.

He also said the council accepted the police decision not to allow the Barisan Nasional rally at Stadium Nasional in Bukit Jalil on Saturday.

"We adhere to the wishes of the police who are enforcing the law."

He said the recent political and economic developments in the country were discussed at length during the meeting.

"Umno members are united and have accepted the action taken by the council at its last meeting. In fact, we have endorsed the decisions taken," he said.

The council had on Sept 3 expelled Anwar.

Dr Mahathir said the council also decided that all Umno members should respect the decision of the High Court that no statement should be made on the guilt or innocence of Anwar outside the context of his trial.

Dr Mahathir refuted a suggestion that the court decision was directed at him, saying that it also affected Anwar's supporters.

On concerns expressed by the United States State Department about Anwar's detention and allegations that he was assaulted while in police custody, Dr Mahathir said the US should have the courtesy to check the facts before making public statements.

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