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Umno founding member dies at 99

JOHOR BARU, Sun. - Tan Sri Anwar Abdul Malek, one of the founding members of Umno, died at the Sultanah Aminah Hospital here last night.

The Umno veteran, who was 99, was buried at the Jalan Mahmudiah Muslim cemetery here after Zohor prayers today.

He is survived by his wife, Puan Sri Saodah Abdullah, 78, and six children (two sons - Ahmad Zaki and Mohd Hyssny; and four daughters - Shurkiah, Marina, Zarinah and Zainah), 18 grandchildren and 26 great grandchildren.

His daughters, Zarinah and Zainah were by his bedside in the hospital when he died at 7.55pm. Anwar was in poor health and had been in hospital for over a month.

A long line of Johor Umno dignitaries called at his house in Jalan Harun, off Jalan Abdul Samad here, to pay their last respects.

Anwar's involvement in politics began at the age of 20, when he joined the Muslim Debate Association in Muar in 1918.

After the Second World War, he moved to Johor Baru and worked as chief clerk in the Works Department.

There he got acquainted with anti-Malayan Union personalities such as Datuk Onn Jaffar and Datuk Abdul Rahman Yassin, the father of former Deputy Prime Minister Tun Dr Ismail.

Anwar later went on to become Onn's private secretary when the latter became Johor Menteri Besar in 1947.

He continued holding the post when Wan Idris Ibrahim succeeded Onn as Menteri Besar, until his retirement in 1953.

Anwar, as a founding member of Umno, was looked upon with much respect by the party's rank and file, although he never held any position in the party.

He was responsible for coming up with the name United Malays Organisation (which was later changed to Umno), as he was inspired by the founding of the United Nations.

It was Anwar who led a delegation of early Malay leaders from Johor Baru to see Onn, who was then Batu Pahat district officer, to lead the Malays.

Anwar felt only Onn had the charisma and the qualities of leadership to spearhead Umno into a national political movement to oppose British rule and fight for independence.

After his retirement, he devoted much of his time to voluntary work, serving on the Johor Prison Pardons Board, several school boards and initiated the founding of the Johor Spastics Children's Association.

He was also responsible for negotiating with the Johor State Government for special allowances for the aged in old folk's homes.

Anwar, who has been immobile and confined to his home because of his age and poor health for several years, met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Johor Baru in July 1996.

The meeting was arranged by Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman in conjunction with the Prime Minister's two-day official visit to the State.

He was among two other Umno veterans - historian and writer Shahrom Hussain and former Johor Umno Wanita chief Datuk Fatimah Majid - who were specially invited to the reception with Dr Mahathir.

Ghani, describing Anwar at the time, said: "He is a man whose intelligence and dedication to Umno and the Malay community had benefited the party and the Malays.

"The younger generation could learn a lot from Anuar's struggle and undivided loyalty to the party," he said.

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