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LEAD Mahathir-Anwar

UMNO GRASSROOT LEADERS ACCEPT MAHATHIR'S EXPLANATION

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 8 (Bernama) -- Some 5,000 Umno grassroots leaders gathered here today accepted party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's explanation why he sacked Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"They seem to accept ... there were no signs that they didn't," Dr Mahathir told reporters after the one-and-a-half hour closed door meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC).

He hoped that following this, he will not have to give further explanations.

Dr Mahathir, who earlier in the day said Anwar was removed because of "low morals", said he related to the Umno members the events leading to Anwar's dismissal.

The gathering was attended by state, divisional and branch leaders. It was the first direct explanation by Dr Mahathir to party members since Anwar's sacking from the Cabinet on Wednesday and his expulsion from the party the next day.

"I told them that he was not qualified to lead the country, that his character does not qualify him to be a leader," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said that apart from police investigations, he did his own investigations into the allegations against Anwar and was convinced (of Anwar's involvement).

Anwar has been accused of a host of misdemeanours, including sexual misconduct, leaking state secrets and threatening national security.

Asked about the possibility of Anwar being readmitted to the party on appeal by some divisions from his home-state Pulau Pinang, Dr Mahathir said: "No, not a hope."

He said the Umno leaders would help to explain what had happened to the people on the ground as many were still confused.

"They need to be told by our people," he said.

However, he said there would be some die-hards who could not be convinced even after the matter had been explained to them.

Asked if he should also explain to all Malaysians, the prime minister said: "I don't think I need to explain to Malaysians at large as over time, they will understand."

-- BERNAMA

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