

PANEL IS FREE TO ACT: PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The recently-formed Umno unity committee will have a "free hand" in trying to resolve the dispute arising from the April 24 party elections, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"I will not try to influence them in any way ... All I want is for the matter to be settled," the Umno president and Prime Minister told reporters here after opening the Orang Asli Museum at Gombak this morning.

He said the five-man committee could use its own discretion to resolve the dispute, which had resulted in a suit by 12 Umno members seeking to declare the party elections null and void.

Asked whether the committee would make any offers or compromise to the 12 to drop the suit, he said: "It is up to the committee ... they have been given a free hand."

The committee set up by the

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— Dr Mahathir yesterday



Umno supreme council at its meeting on Saturday — is chaired by party secretary-general Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid. It is the first grouping of members of what have come to be known as the *A Team* and the *B Team* (allied to Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Datuk Musa Hitam).

The *A Team* members in the committee, besides Datuk Seri Sanusi, are information chief Senator Hussein Ahmad and supreme council member Datuk Napsiah Omar.

From the *B Team* are vice-president Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and supreme council member Datuk Kadir Sheikh Fadzir.

In announcing the committee, Dr Mahathir had said that it had a wide area of jurisdiction with no terms of reference laid down.

Ten of the 12 plaintiffs were reported today as saying they were willing to meet the committee to resolve the dispute.

When asked about this, Dr Mahathir said he only read about it in the papers, and all he knew about the matter was that "only one of them has withdrawn" as a plaintiff.

Asked if he thought that person could influence the others, Dr Mahathir said: "All I want is for the matter to be settled — that's all."

On a statement reportedly made by one of the 12, Encik Yusoff Othman of Penang, that Datuk Seri Sanusi should not be heading the committee because he was an interested party, Dr Mahathir said:

"We are all interested parties. There is nobody who is not an inter-

ested party. Datuk Abdullah (who Encik Yusoff suggested should chair the committee) is also an interested party.

"I am not going to say anything that will influence anybody or the committee."

Clarifying another aspect of the committee, Deputy President Abdul Ghafar Baba said the supreme council did not decide on who should chair the committee.

That was left to the discretion of the committee members, he said.

It was reported today that Encik Ghafar had announced that Datuk Seri Sanusi had been appointed chairman.

"I was a bit confused when I made the announcement. I mistook it for another committee on celebrations of Umno Day which is chaired by Datuk Seri Sanusi," he told reporters after launching the Fruits Industry Council at the Putra World Trade Centre.

"Actually, there is no necessity for a chairman. Datuk Seri Sanusi as secretary-general can call for a meeting," he added.

As to the functions of the committee, Encik Ghafar said: "I do not want to interfere . . . I believe in the proverb that too many cooks spoil the broth. If I do so, what is the point of setting up the committee?"

Datuk Seri Sanusi, who was present at the Press conference, said: "The supreme council did not set any restrictions or guidelines. We were given the task to resolve the case out of court."

He said the committee was "not empowered to reunify factions in Umno" but he believed that once an out-of-court settlement was reached, it would "help developments" towards this end.

"Our job is not to reunite Umno . . . that is too big a task. The most important thing is the out-of-court settlement. That should be resolved first," he added.

Datuk Seri Sanusi said he would call for a meeting of the committee this week and they would decide on whether to meet the 12 individually or collectively.

He said no deadline had been set for the committee to settle the problem, but it had to submit a report on its progress at the next supreme council meeting.