

No offers made to Umno 12 who filed suit: Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — No "offers" have been made to the 12 Umno members to settle out-of-court the dispute over the validity of the April Umno elections, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Umno president was also not aware that the high-powered special committee set up by the party Supreme Council to resolve the dispute was working out some form of a compromise.

"It is up to the committee to achieve a settlement. I am not going to say anything that might influence the committee or anybody," he told reporters after opening the museum of the Orang Asli Affairs Department in Gombak.

Dr Mahathir was responding to questions on Press reports that an out-of-court settlement of the dispute was on the cards. The 12 Umno members had filed a suit to challenge the validity of the party's general assembly.

The committee, comprising Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, Umno vice-president Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, information chief Haji Hussein Ahmad and council members Datuk Kadir Sheikh Fadzir and Datuk Napsiah Omar, is meeting for the first time this week.

Willingness

Dr Mahathir also said he was not aware that 10 of the 12 Umno members had expressed their willingness to meet the committee.

"That's what the newspapers say. I don't know," he said.

According to the reports, the 10 who had expressed their willingness to meet the committee are Kelantan branch members Muda Yaakub (Bukit Yong A), Abdul Rahman Yaakub (Batu Hitam), Mohamad Yusoff Yunus (Gong Kedak), Abdul Rahman Hassan (Pangkal Melerek), Daud Che Soh (Kampung Pek), Mohamad Noor Senak (Pengkalan Machang), Pahang branch members Hussein Abdul Manaf (Pekan), Mokhtar Haji Ahmad (Pekan Lama) and Nibong Tebal (Penang) division members Mohamad Noor Othman and Yusoff Othman.

Dr Mahathir said as far as he knew only one person had withdrawn from the group.

On comments by certain quarters that a neutral person and not Datuk Seri Sanusi should be heading the committee because he is an "interested party" in the case, he said: "We are all interested; there is nobody that is not interested."

On suggestions that Datuk Abdullah be the committee chairman instead, Dr Mahathir said: "He is also an interested party."

Meanwhile, Umno deputy president Abdul Ghafar Baba today clarified that Datuk Seri Sanusi is not the chairman of the special committee.

He said the Supreme Council at its meeting on Saturday did not appoint anybody to chair the committee.

Speaking to newsmen after launching the Malaysian Fruit Industry Council here, the Deputy Prime Minister said the Supreme Council had agreed to the formation of two committees during the meeting.

Encik Ghafar said Datuk Sanusi was appointed to chair the committee on Umno celebrations.

"Nobody was appointed to chair the special committee," he said. "It is up to the committee to decide on the appointment ... However, it is not necessary to appoint a chairman. Datuk Sanusi, as secretary-general, can call the others for a meeting."

Encik Ghafar had said on Sunday that Datuk Sanusi was the chairman of the committee.

The Deputy Prime Minister today said the committee should be left alone to carry out its task.

Datuk Seri Sanusi, meanwhile, said: "As the secretary-general, I only call for the

Leave them alone to carry out task'

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meeting. It is up to the committee to decide on the details."

He said the first meeting of the committee would decide, among other things, where and when to begin negotiations with the group.

It would also have to decide whether to see the 12 individually or in a group.

Datuk Sanusi said he was pleased to note that 10 of the 12 have expressed their willingness to meet the committee to resolve the dispute.

"We have to place the interest of the party above everything else. If this happens, everything can be resolved," he said.

Asked whether he was confident the matter could be settled out of court, Datuk Seri Sanusi said: "God willing."

On the terms of reference of the committee, Datuk Seri Sanusi said the Supreme Council only asked the committee to resolve the dispute.

"There were no guidelines or a time-frame."

However, he said the committee would have a report for the next Supreme Council meeting.

Datuk Seri Sanusi also explained that the task of the committee was not to reunite the two factions in Umno.

"Our role is to resolve the dispute. Certainly, if the case is resolved, it would definitely assist efforts to reunify party members."

Asked whether it would be difficult to persuade the 12 to settle the matter out of court, Datuk Seri Sanusi said it would depend on the persons involved.

"To love or to hate is a matter of decision. If we want the matter to be resolved it can be done. But if we do not want it to happen, it will not."

In a new development, six of the 12 Umno members who filed the suit said in Kota Baru they were willing to settle the dispute out of court.

The six are Encik Abdul Rahman Hassan, Encik Daud, Encik Muda, Encik Abdul Rahman Yaakub, Encik Mohamad Yusof and Encik Mohamad Noor Senak.

Consult

While they were willing to resolve the suit in an out-of-court settlement, they would only agree to meet the unity committee three days after they had consulted their respective branches.

Encik Abdul Rahman Hassan, who called the *Berita Harian* today, said they would have to consult their respective branches before meeting the unity committee because the decision to file the suit was made by the branches.

"The decision to file the suit was made in accordance with the wishes of the branches after appeals to protest against the validity of the divisions' delegates meetings went unheeded," he added.

He said it was necessary that they be given a new mandate from their respective branches before meeting the unity committee towards resolving the dispute.

"I personally agree to resolve the matter in an out-of-court settlement for Umno's sake, but as a member of the Pangkal Melerek party branch, I should bow to the opinion of the branch," he added.

He said he could not ignore the views of his branch even though the suit was filed in his name.