

Every Cabinet member must take collective responsibility

Dismissal for Ministers if they breach code

By Manan Osman, Vijayan Menon and Tengku Sariffuddin

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries can be dismissed if they violate the proposed code of ethics for government leaders, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

This is among the disciplinary actions that can be taken for going against the code.

Dr Mahathir said the code would require every Cabinet member to accept the fact that they had collective responsibility for decisions made.

He said none of them could say they disagreed with a Cabinet decision by citing that it (the decision) was not his but was made by the Government.

"This can happen in other countries. But here we have a joint responsibility," he told reporters at the Putra World Trade Centre after officiating at the 49th Umno Anniversary celebration. He was replying to a question on the proposed code.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said Cabinet members would be prohibited from engaging in business activities under the code.

"We will also determine what private activities are forbidden.

He said the code would clearly state that where government leaders were involved in making a decision in which there was a conflict of interest, they would have to leave the meeting even if they did not take part in the discussions.

At present, it was not clear as to what they should do in a similar situation, he added.

"We have ways to take action including terminating their positions if they violate the code of ethics."

On whether immoral conduct such as committing *khalwat* would constitute a breach of the code, he said it would be, since every leader in the Government must be morally upright so as not to tarnish his own, party or government image.

He said the code would be made public once it was finalised.

"At present, the proposed code is applicable to MPs who have been selected to be in the Government. This is because they have a special responsibility and power and as such, it is very important to have a code of ethics."

Dr Mahathir said it was appropriate that the government leadership had the code as the civil service, judiciary and Rulers already had their own code of ethics.

On whether the government leaders would have to declare their assets again, Dr Mahathir said they had

to, even if they had declared their assets to him prior to the election.

He said legal action could also be instituted against government leaders if they contravened the law.

Asked whether there was any new agenda for the newly-elected Government, Dr Mahathir said there was no fresh agenda.

"Our agenda has already been determined. What is needed now is the approach and the way to implement it to ensure the success of our vision."

On the DAP's grouses against the Election Commission on mistakes during the counting of votes, Dr Mahathir said: "We too are not happy."

"For instance, (Deputy Prime Minister) Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim got a lot more votes and there is a possibility that (DAP Jelutong MP) Karpal Singh could lose. We want this to be reviewed."

In an obvious reference to DAP MP for Bukit Bintang Wee Chee Keong, he said the commission had allowed certain candidates, who had been convicted by a Malaysian court, to contest in the recent general election.

"We want to study this matter, too."