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Muhammad ceases to play Umno VP role (HL)

Ramlan Said; Tengku Sariffuddin

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib will cease to function as Umno vice-president and will not be involved in the activities of the party supreme council until the conclusion of his court case in Brisbane.

This was decided by the supreme council at its meeting today which also approved a request by Muhammad to be temporarily excused from attending its meetings.

Prime Minister and party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told a Press conference after the meeting of the written request made by Muhammad who was not present at today's meeting.

Muhammad faces two charges of failing to declare RM2.4 million while leaving the Brisbane International Airport for New Zealand last Dec 22 and for making a false declaration.

He resigned as Menteri Besar on April 14 and on the same day also gave up his positions as chairman of the Selangor and Federal Territory Umno liaison committee.

Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who was asked by Dr Mahathir to explain Muhammad's application, said the vice-president would not be involved in matters relating to the supreme council during this period.

Dr Mahathir also said Selangor Menteri Besar-designate Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, who is a supreme council member, has been appointed chairman of the Selangor Umno liaison committee.

Deputy Information Minister Datuk Suleiman Mohamad has been appointed chairman of the Federal Territory Umno liaison committee. Before their appointments, they were deputies in their respective committees.

Dr Mahathir said the party supreme council would not tolerate or protect those involved in corruption, regardless of their positions in the party or Government.

"The party must be firm in dealing with those involved in corrupt practices, irrespective of their status," he said, adding that "all members agreed we have to be firm even if it involved our friends or whether they are high or low-ranking officials."

On whether this was an early warning to Umno members as elections would be held at the divisional level next year and the general assembly in 1999, Dr Mahathir said it applied all the time.

The party president said Umno would not tolerate corruption at any level in the party and the Government.

"Our stand is clear. We will not tolerate corrupt people, no matter who they are," he said.

The supreme council also agreed to put up signboards with Quranic verses and their interpretation on the danger of corruption. The boards will be put up nationwide with the co-operation of State Governments.

He said the supreme council was of the opinion that there was a need to remind Muslims of the teachings of Islam, especially their attitude towards life and death.

The Prime Minister said it also decided that local authorities would embark on a vision to improve the lifestyles of Malaysians, especially in enhancing the level of cleanliness.

He said although Malaysia had achieved a higher standard of living and was now a middle-income country, the people's lifestyle was still at the

level when it was backward.

Local authorities should enhance the level of cleanliness in Malaysia, he said.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, when asked by Dr Mahathir to elaborate on the matter, said the supreme council had discussed at length the issue of cleanliness.

Najib said the Prime Minister wanted the level of cleanliness in public places such as toilets, stalls and flats to be improved.

In this respect, Najib, who is also Education Minister, said the supreme council decided to make it compulsory for schoolchildren to take part in keeping their schools clean.

He said the ministry would issue guidelines soon to outline the role of students in maintaining cleanliness.

This included collection of rubbish, sweeping, cleaning the floor and keeping the toilets clean.

"We want cleanliness to become part of Malaysian culture and way of life," he said.

Najib also announced that the supreme council had approved the setting up of an Umno training centre to inculcate awareness of the principles and objectives of the party struggle.

The training will emphasise values which will make Umno members more committed to the party struggle, he said.

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