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Quit to protect Umno's image (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Two senior Umno leaders today said party leaders drawn into cases that could tarnish the image and reputation of the party should consider relinquishing their posts.

They said the action would also help protect the party from possible humiliation.

In Kepala Batas, vice-president Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said: "The relinquishing of party posts could be an option for all Umno members to follow to save Umno's image from being tarnished.

"By doing so, these leaders - although they feel that they are not guilty - would protect the party from humiliation and from being dragged into the controversy affecting them."

Abdullah, who is also Foreign Minister, said this to reporters after opening the Umno Bertam branch annual general meeting at Dewan Maliki.

His statement came in the wake of party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's announcement yesterday pertaining to the resignation of Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib.

Dr Mahathir also said that members should not smear Umno's name by doing something which may cast aspersions on the party.

After chairing the Umno supreme council meeting, the party president told newsmen yesterday that Muhammad has decided to quit his posts of Menteri Besar, Selangor and Federal Territory Umno liaison chief and Selangor and Federal Territory Barisan Nasional chairman.

Muhammad was charged with failing to declare cash equivalent to RM2.4 million while leaving Brisbane International Airport for New Zealand on Dec 22 last year.

He is also expected to be charged with making a false declaration when his case comes up for hearing on Aug 19.

Muhammad is also being investigated by the Anti-Corruption Agency in connection with his wife's alleged ownership of several properties worth millions of ringgit in Sovereign Islands and in Australia.

Abdullah, who is also the Kepala Batas Umno division chairman and Bertam Umno branch chairman, said Muhammad's resignation showed that Umno leaders were not indispensable.

"Umno leaders too would have to face the music," he said, "if they are found involved with issues that could jeopardise the party's image."

Besides boosting the people's confidence in Umno, it showed that party leaders can make their own decisions to protect party interest and image, he said.

Asked on the numerous complaints of indiscipline and reports of unethical conduct at the branch level, Abdullah expressed surprise at the growing complaints and reports of unethical conduct.

He had never come across "so many complaints before," he said.

"Now, we even hear of meetings being held inside a bus," he said. "I hope all members help check such complaints so that they would not be disastrous to the party."

In Kangar, party secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik also voiced a sentiment similar to that of Abdullah. Sabbaruddin said: "These leaders should quit if they want to save their organisation."

Sabbaruddin, who is also Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister, however, said relinquishing their posts should not be confined to the party alone. It should also include those holding posts in societies and other

organisations.

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