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Support efforts to fight graft, Dr M calls

PRIME MINISTER Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Umno leaders to support efforts to fight corruption in the Government and party although action taken may involve their friends.

"We have to accept that we not only need to be clean but also look clean, or else our credibility will be lost.

"I hope the Supreme Council members will give their full support, like the Cabinet ministers, to actions that have been and will be taken although it may affect our friends," he said during a video conferencing session from London with Umno Supreme Council members.

Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is also Umno deputy president, chaired the Supreme Council meeting for the first time yesterday. Dr Mahathir, the Umno president, is on a two-month vacation since May 19.

Dr Mahathir said if the Government does not act now, the corrupt elements within the Government and the party will think that they are protected.

"Whatever they have done, they may think that we will protect them. This is unhealthy for the party and the Government.

"I hope the Supreme Council members will discuss this at the meeting. This is very important," he said, adding that the measures taken followed discussions with his deputy.

In response, Anwar said the matter was discussed at length at the meeting and the members have pledged their full support.

"After hearing all views, everyone agreed on the stand that stern action is needed to tackle the corruption problem," he added.

When Dr Mahathir asked whether the meeting addressed many problems, Anwar said: "Not that many. However, we discussed the measures that have been taken to rid the party and Government of corruption."

At the meeting yesterday, Primary Industries Deputy Minister Siti Zainab Abu Bakar was sacked in connection with the missing RM1.8 million from the Wanita Umno accounts. Also suspended from the party was Senator Habshah Osman, the movement's former secretary.

During the video conferencing, Dr Mahathir also said he visited the Frazer-Nash Research Ltd's laboratory in Leatherhead, south-east London, and found that there are many ideas which Malaysia can adopt.

"I came here (Frazer-Nash) to see the research they are doing and look into the possibility of us borrowing some of their ideas.

"They have many things to show, mostly electronics such as electric car, golf-cart... the one that may be of our interest to us is the display layout for aircraft," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said the company has made improvements to the Solar-Baby, a solar-powered three-wheeler.

Earlier reports said that Frazer-Nash, Britain's former defence systems and sports car maker, plans to set up a plant in Malaysia to produce and market the solar-car this year.

The company was said to have been negotiating with Fima Corp Bhd to set up a joint venture.

"Tan Sri Basir Ismail (Fima Corp chairman) is also here with me," Dr Mahathir said, adding that several other Malaysian businessmen are "accompanying" him on his vacation in London.

"There seems to be no privacy. I am supposed to be here for holiday.

They forced me to work, so I am asking for more days off," he said in jest, adding that he was feeling fine and doing some writing.

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