

10 MAY 1997

Mahathir-Muhammad

UMNO SUPREME COUNCIL APPROVES MUHAMMAD'S APPLICATION FOR LEAVE

KUALA LUMPUR, May 10 (Bernama) -- Umno vice president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhamad Taib, who faces two charges in a Brisbane court pertaining to his alleged attempt to transfer cash equivalent to RM2.4 million out of Australia, has been granted leave from attending Umno supreme council meetings.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the Umno Supreme Council, at its meeting today, approved his application for leave until after the disposal of the cases.

Muhammad was detained at the Brisbane international airport on Dec 22, last year and charged the following day.

He resigned as Selangor Menteri Besar and chairman of the Selangor and Federal Territory Umno Liaison Committee on April 14.

Dr Mahathir, who chaired the meeting, also announced the appointment of Selangor Menteri Besar-designate Datuk Abu Hassan Omar as chairman of the Selangor Umno Liaison Committee.

Titivangsa Umno Division head Datuk Suleiman Mohamad has been appointed chairman of the Federal Territory Umno Liaison Committee.

Muhammad did not attend today's Supreme Council meeting.

Asked if Muhammad had gone on leave at the request of the council, Dr Mahathir said: "Muhammad (himself) applied for leave."

Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik, asked by reporters later as to when Muhammad applied for the leave, said: "He sought the leave before this meeting, but I can't remember the date."

Several people from within and outside the party have previously said that they felt Muhammad should in addition to resigning as the Selangor Menteri Besar also give up his Umno vice-president's post.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir said neither Wanita Umno's former chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz or current chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman was involved in the movement's accounts case.

He said Supreme Council, which had received a report on the case from party treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin, had decided that those implicated be brought before the party's disciplinary committee.

"With this, the matter is closed," he said.

Dr Mahathir refused to name the persons involved saying it was an internal matter of the party.

He said the RM1.8 million missing from the Wanita Umno account would be returned. Most of it have already been paid back, he said, but declined to reveal who returned the money.

Dr Mahathir said it was up to the disciplinary committee to determine if there was any wrongdoing, and the party would take appropriate action against the persons involved.

On the investigation being carried out by the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) against eight state executive councillors for alleged corruption, Dr Mahathir said the Supreme Council had no information as the ACA did not report to the council.

He said the Supreme Council also discussed about corruption and the party held firmly to its stand not to defend anyone who was involved in the practice irrespective of whether he was a friend or holder of high office.

"Actions against those involved in corruption will not be defended by anyone," he said, adding that the discussion was on corruption in general and not specifically on money politics in the party.

Asked if the firm stand was a warning to candidates in party elections, the Prime Minister said it applied at all times and in all matters involving the party and government. -- BERNAMA

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