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Muhammad's case to be discussed

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Umno supreme council which meets on June 8, will discuss the position of Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib as a vice-president of the party and his eligibility to contest in next year's council elections.

This follows Muhammad's acquittal yesterday on two charges of falsely declaring the money he took into Australia in December 1996 and failing to declare more than AS\$1.2 million (RM2.9 million) when he left the country.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today since Muhammad went on leave as a vice-president following a decision by the council, the matter would have to be referred to the council now.

The council decided on May 10 last year that Muhammad would cease to function as Umno vice-president and would not be involved in the activities of the council pending the outcome of his court case.

Today, the Prime Minister, after opening the 45th MCA general assembly at Wisma MCA here, was also asked whether Muhammad would be ordered to declare his assets.

Dr Mahathir said: "By right as Menteri Besar (then), he must declare his assets to me."

Asked whether he was surprised by the extent of Muhammad's wealth and whether Muhammad had declared his assets to him, Dr Mahathir said: "I think I will not answer it now. Let the supreme council meet first, after which I will give my answer."

Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was also asked to comment on Muhammad's position. Anwar, who just came back from a working visit to New York and London, said Muhammad's position would also be discussed by Umno's management and discipline committee.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting with Commonwealth secretary-general Chief Emeka Anyaoku and Commonwealth Youth Ministers here, Anwar said the committee's views would then be presented to the party president and the supreme council.

He said the party welcomed the Australian court's decision.

In Shah Alam, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar today said he was very relieved when he heard that Muhammad had been acquitted.

He said after 18 months waiting for the case to conclude, Muhammad could now concentrate on his duty as the State Assemblyman for Batang Kali.

On Muhammad's political future, Abu Hassan said that would be up to the Umno leadership to decide.

"I am very thankful that the case has been concluded and that Muhammad has been acquitted," he said after opening a seminar on economic problems for Government servants today.

Meanwhile, Kelantan Umno deputy liaison chief Datuk Annuar Musa today said the verdict on Muhammad should be respected by all.

Umno Wanita head Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said it would support the supreme council's decision on Muhammad's political future.

She said since he was found not guilty, he should not be denied his rights.

"If we follow precedents, he should come back to the (vice-president's) post ... but it is up to the supreme council to discuss."

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob, who is also Umno supreme council member, said he was grateful that Muhammad had been acquitted and welcome Muhammad's active

participation in Umno.

"It is up to the council to decide whether to accept Muhammad or not," he told reporters after launching a seminar on the "Role of Consumers during the Economic Situation".

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