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Umno veterans to explain situation

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - An informal consultative group comprising Umno veterans was formed at today's gathering of 200 party stalwarts, which included two former Deputy Prime Ministers, four ex-Menteris Besar and an ex-Chief Minister.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who briefed the gathering on the economic situation, told the Press later that the group would give recommendations, advice and information to the party leadership and supreme council.

The setting up of the group was suggested at the meeting by former Foreign Minister Datuk Rais Yatim, who is also a former Menteri Besar of Negri Sembilan.

Dr Mahathir told the Press after the two-and-a-half hour gathering that the group would be headed by former deputy president Tun Ghafar Baba.

Ghafar said he would pick five veterans to sit in the group which would carry out the directives of the party headquarters.

Also present today were another former deputy president and Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam and former Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Saat (Johor), Tan Sri Mohammed Yaakob (Kelantan) and Tan Sri Osman Aroff (Kedah) and former Malacca Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik.

Others included former Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Mustafa Jabar, former Education Minister Tan Sri Khir Johari, Umno permanent chairman Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah and former Federal Territory Minister Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad.

Former Wanita chief Tan Sri Aishah Ghani and former deputy minister Datuk Paduka Rahmah Osman were also at the meeting. Many of those present are still active in the party.

Former Kedah Assembly Speaker Datuk Abdullah Ismail, 71, now branch Umno head in the Yan division, said: "We will return home to explain to the people the situation."

Ghafar said the briefing was to enable Umno veterans to understand the economic situation better so that they could explain it to the rakyat.

Ghafar also reminded Umno Ministers in the Cabinet of collective responsibility.

"Cabinet Ministers must be united. If anyone is not happy over something, he should raise the issue in Cabinet meetings.

"If he is not happy with the Cabinet's decision, then he should leave because if there is a split in the Cabinet, it will only cause instability."

Asked if he was referring to any particular Minister, Ghafar said he was merely advising Umno Ministers.

On the issue of nepotism in the party, Ghafar said he was not sure if such a trend existed.

"Those who accuse others of practising nepotism should spell out the meaning of the word first. These are the same people who benefited from the Government's policies. Now they have become top officials," he said, adding that it was better for party members to work for the betterment of the party than to accuse others of wrongdoings.

Khir Johari said the veterans backed the measures announced by Dr Mahathir as explained during the briefing.

He said the move to form the group was commendable.

Mohammed Yaakob said as far as he was concerned, there was no such thing

as nepotism in the party.

"To me, there is no such thing. However, we should not be arguing about it. It is time we joined forces and explained to villagers the problems faced by the country."

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