

09/06/1998

Umno council extends V-P's leave

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THE Umno supreme council last night extended the leave of party vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib.

Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Muhammad's leave of absence has been extended until the court makes a decision on the case.

"The supreme council holds the opinion that Muhammad cannot assume his duty as a Umno vice president. Furthermore, there is news that he will be taken to court again.

"As such, he is not yet allowed to assume his duties as the vice president. His leave of absence will be extended until the court makes a decision on his case," he told reporters after chairing a three-hour Umno supreme council meeting in Kuala Lumpur last night.

Dr Mahathir said Muhammad had met him yesterday morning to submit a declaration on his assets.

"I am now checking to find out when he last made such a declaration ... I was busy today so I did not check it properly," he added. The Prime Minister visited the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang yesterday morning.

Asked whether Muhammad's series of court cases, of which one was in Australia, had caused any damage to the party, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not know whether there is any damage or not. It just goes to show that we have always adopted a stand that if any party member does anything that warrants a case being taken against him, we will not stand in the way.

Dr Mahathir said this has been the history of Umno, which had seen several Menteri Besar facing court action, adding that: "We do not protect the guilty parties but if the person is innocent, we will defend him."

On the status of Negri Sembilan State Executive Councillor Datuk Waad Mansor who was charged last May with five counts of corruption, Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the supreme council had received his resignation last month.

"He is now on leave of absence until after the court decision is made on the charges," he added.

To a question on the main theme of the upcoming Umno assembly, Dr Mahathir said the economic problems would most likely be the main theme.

"This is not surprising. I myself would be doing injustice if I do not talk about the economic problems during the meeting," he added.

Asked whether corruption and nepotism would also be raised at the meeting, Dr Mahathir said it is up to party members to do so if they felt that the matters needed attention.

On the opposition's call for a roundtable meeting with other political parties to discuss the economic situation, Dr Mahathir said: "We do not want to politicise this issue. The opposition had said that they will win more seats because of the economic downturn. To them, it is a political issue which will benefit them.

"So it is up to the people to accept whether it is proper to make use of the country's misfortune to improve their (the opposition) fortune," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said the supreme council will discuss in detail the Indonesian economic situation, and the lessons that could be learnt from the republic's experience.

It also discussed the criticisms made towards the New Economic Policy.
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