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Firms 'compelled' to appoint Anwar's men

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Many companies were compelled to appoint associates of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as chairmen and directors when he was in Government, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

By accommodating these cronies, the companies faced less problems and "everything becomes easy," Dr Mahathir said.

"This is the effect of cronyism," Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, told a Press conference after chairing a party supreme council meeting.

The Prime Minister said the Government knew of people who acquired many directorships and became chairmen due to their association with Anwar, the former Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister.

When asked by the Press, Dr Mahathir, however, did not specifically say whether more cases of cronies amassing wealth would be exposed. To another question, the Prime Minister said he would name the crony who amassed wealth of more than RM230 million "when the time comes."

He said the Government was still studying whether action could be taken against the particular crony.

"I did inform the supreme council (on the crony) but I did not mention the name. I have the statement (declaration of assets) made to me as Prime Minister," he added.

On Saturday, Dr Mahathir had in Alor Star revealed that a crony of a former national leader had acquired wealth of more than RM230 million.

On another matter, the supreme council did not make any decision on the position of Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhd Taib who had been acquitted of a charge of failing to declare his and that of his family's assets to the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA).

Asked whether this meant Muhammad would continue to be on leave from performing his duties as Umno vice-president, Dr Mahathir said "Yes" without elaborating.

The supreme council had on April 14, 1997 directed Muhammad to go on leave after he was charged in a Brisbane court in Australia for failing to declare foreign currencies totalling RM2.4 million. Following the directive, Muhammad resigned as Selangor Menteri Besar and the liaison chief for Selangor and Federal Territory Umno.

On Shit, Datuk Shahnon Ahmad's book, Dr Mahathir said Umno did not intend to propose that the Government ban it but this showed how low a person was prepared to stoop to sow hatred against the Prime Minister in particular.

On members leaving the party, he said Umno sacked 26 of them for joining Pas and Parti Keadilan Nasional. At the same time, the supreme council approved 58 new branches, 53 of which are in the Gua Musang division.

On the reported bid by the United States to recruit 12 Malaysians as agents of the CIA to infiltrate Umno at the grassroots, Dr Mahathir said he read about how an agent was arrested in a column written by Datuk Mazlan Nordin (Mazlan writes Personally Speaking in the New Straits Times every Friday.)

"It is quite possible that other countries have been recruiting agents," Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir added that the Government was studying proposals from various quarters to acquire Malaysian shares under the now defunct Singapore central-order-limit book (Clob) exchange.

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