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Mahathir-Branches

UMNO SETTING UP 58 NEW BRANCHES

KUALA LUMPUR, May 3 (Bernama) -- Umno was setting up more new branches amid talk that the party was losing support.

The Umno supreme council which met today approved the setting up of 58 new branches, majority of which are in Gua Musang, Kelantan.

Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said 53 of the branches would be established in the Gua Musang division headed by former Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

The meeting also decided to expel 27 Umno members for breaching party discipline, he told a news conference after the meeting at the party headquarters at the Putra World Trade Centre here tonight.

A party member from Sabah was expelled for life for contesting as an independent candidate in the ninth Sabah state election in March, he said, without revealing his identity.

Datu Bara Datu Alawadin contested as an independent for the Sembulan seat in the Tanjung Aru parliamentary constituency. The Umno management and disciplinary committee had recommended that Datu Bara be expelled for life.

Twenty-six party members at the grassroots level were also expelled for joining PAS and Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan).

The Umno management and disciplinary committee at its last meeting decided to recommend to the supreme council to expel 24 members including Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, the wife of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. Dr Wan Azizah is now Keadilan president.

Dr Mahathir also said the supreme council did not discuss about the pact among opposition parties as there was no necessity for it now.

Asked whether he informed the supreme council members of his intention to hand over his post to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi after the general election as he said in Alor Setar on Sunday, the prime minister said the matter was also not discussed at the meeting.

He said this was because it was a known fact that his deputy would succeed him as prime minister when he retired.

" When Datuk Seri Anwar was my deputy, I thought he will succeed me but he was found to be unsuitable and I had to replace him with another person," he added.

-- BERNAMA

AFY/ARA TS