

17 FEB 2000

Mahathir-Muhammad

MUHAMMAD TAIB CAN ATTEND UMNO SUPREME COUNCIL MEETING

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 17 (Bernama) -- Former Selangor Menteri Besar Selangor Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhamad Taib, who is on leave from his duties as Umno vice-president, is now allowed to attend the Umno supreme council meetings, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"He can take his place as vice-president at the supreme council meetings," the prime minister, who is also the Umno president, said after chairing the council meeting, here.

Asked why Muhammad was only allowed to do so now when his court cases had been disposed of long ago, Dr Mahathir said Muhammad had appealed to the supreme council.

"He made an appeal and we considered the appeal and we had no reason (not to allow it) because he had been acquitted," he said.

Muhammad, 53, resigned as Selangor menteri besar in April 1997 after he was charged in a Brisbane airport in Australia with failure to declare cash in various currencies amounting to RM2.7 million in late 1996 and was later allowed to go on leave from his duties as Umno vice-president.

He was acquitted of the currency charges by a Brisbane court in May 1998.

He was later acquitted by the High Court here of failing to declare his and his family's assets and on April 10 last year, the attorney-general decided not to proceed with the appeal against his acquittal.

Last year the supreme council disallowed Muhamad, who has been Umno vice-president since 1993, from contesting in the elections at the branch and divisional levels because the court case was still pending.

Dr Mahathir also said that the decision to accept Muhammad was made because he had not committed any offence against the party while on leave.

Earlier, Muhammad had indicated his intention to defend his vice-president's post in the party elections in May.

-- BERNAMA

AR HS JK