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Umno not spreading its wings to Sarawak

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UMNO has decided that it is not time yet for the party to spread its wings to Sarawak although there will be some benefits in such a move, Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

The Umno Supreme Council, after discussing the issue at length, wants to stress that any Umno divisions that have been set up in Sarawak are not recognised by the party, he said.

"If we do go to Sarawak, it will be to strengthen the Barisan Nasional and not to split its component parties," Dr Mahathir said after chairing the Supreme Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

It was reported that former Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu Sarawak deputy president Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha had initiated efforts to bring Umno to Sarawak, including a planned gathering in Kuching on February 27.

Dr Mahathir said he has written to the organising chairman of the gathering to inform him that Umno does not recognise the efforts on behalf of the party in the state, and to request that the gathering be cancelled.

On reports that Group A civil servants will be allowed to participate in politics, the Prime Minister said existing government service rules prohibit these officers from doing so.

"Any statement by anyone that Umno wants those in Group A to be active in politics is simply not true," he said.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said the Supreme Council is satisfied with the candidates selection process and campaigning for the party's upcoming elections in May.

"However, I am quite disappointed with some comments claiming that I want only the president's post to be uncontested, and that I have left it open for a contest for the deputy president's post.

"This implies that I only want to save myself, and this is not true. It was a Supreme Council decision to issue a no-contest advice for the top two posts. This advice is from the Supreme Council and also from me," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked about Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's reported comment that he will not contest either of the top two posts, Dr Mahathir said he welcomes the stand, pointing out that as a member of the Supreme Council, Razaleigh will be expected to honour its unanimous decision.

On the code of ethics for the party elections, Umno management and disciplinary committee chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said candidates cannot buy votes or nominations; give presents to delegates; cover delegates' costs to attend the general assembly.

Dr Mahathir reminded Umno branch officials not to go around meeting potential candidates and asking for something in return for nominating or voting for them.

He also announced that Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib has returned to the Supreme Council as Umno vice president. Muhammad was on leave from party posts pending court cases against him. He was cleared of all charges.

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