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`Help wipe out scourge' (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Umno members, including those found guilty by the party for indulging in money politics, must support the supreme council's efforts to wipe out the scourge, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said it was vital for all members to accept the findings of the party's disciplinary board as this would prove to the people that Umno is very serious in cleansing itself of corrupt leaders.

Members, he said, should close ranks and give undivided support to such efforts, although the cleansing process can be painful to some.

He said this at a closed-door briefing to selected delegates attending the 55th Umno general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre today. The four-day assembly begins tomorrow.

Delegates met after the briefing said Dr Mahathir had likened the cleansing process to the Malay proverb "Ditelan mati emak, dibuang mati bapa" - one that puts Umno in a dilemma because whatever decision made would hurt not only the party but also its members.

Dr Mahathir later told a Press conference it was not certain whether or not this cleansing process would rejuvenate the party, but what the leadership wanted was to clean up the party.

Delegates said the party president had expressed concern that members had failed to heed his repeated appeals to cease resorting to money politics.

He also expressed regret that members today were no longer committed to upholding the party struggle and were more interested in material gains.

That was why many had resorted to selling and buying votes during party elections - one side to ensure they get elected to party positions and the other, an opportunity to make money.

Dr Mahathir said Umno was once looked upon as a sincere and clean party which championed the rights of the Malays, religion and country but today it no longer enjoys this respect because of the conduct of its members.

"He said if members love the party and want it to become the only party for the Malays, they should not question the findings of the board," said a division leader.

"Those who have been found guilty should accept the punishment and continue to serve the party although they no longer hold positions."

The division leader said Dr Mahathir did not want members to compare the manner in which the disciplinary board was conducted and that of a court hearing as it was only an internal inquiry.

"Dr Mahathir said stern action must be taken against offenders as a deterrent to others," added another delegate.

Later at a Press conference, Dr Mahathir said he explained the process of determining who is guilty and not guilty of money politics during the briefing.

"I explained that in the process, some people might escape and there were those who would be caught.

"This is normal ... in a country's legal system too it's the same. There are many murderers but not many were arrested."

On allegations that there were double standards in the cleansing process, Dr Mahathir said anyone could make such claims if they were caught.

Asked to comment on reports that there were members unhappy with the

findings of the disciplinary board, Dr Mahathir said nobody appeared to be so.

Asked if the board needed more members to effectively handle reported cases, Dr Mahathir said the present number was sufficient and there would be no problem increasing the number should the need arise.

On the statement by Umno veteran Tun Ghafar Baba that members of the supreme council should also be investigated, Dr Mahathir said the easiest way to clean up the council is for members to ensure they only chose clean leaders.

"What we have (in the supreme council) are people who are elected by the delegates.

"I appointed Menteri Besar (to sit in the council) and even that, they (MBs) were elected by the people. If we dislike them then from the beginning we should not have chosen them. We can clean up, there is no problem.

"There will be those who will say that those people up there (supreme council members) are also the same (resorting to money politics) ... yes they are the same ... but you choose them ..."