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State liaison heads to hold the fort

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - State Umno liaison committee chairmen will temporarily take over the role of division heads found guilty by the party's disciplinary board of offences relating to money politics.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said they would head the divisions until the appeals of those found guilty were heard by an independent secretariat.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the Prime Minister, said the Umno supreme council decided on this after several of those found guilty had decided to appeal the decisions.

He said the earlier decision allowing the defeated candidates to become division heads after the winners were found guilty of malpractices would be revoked.

"We have decided to hear appeals by those who do so. If the individual found guilty was holding the post of division head, for example, the post would be temporarily held by the State Umno liaison committee chairman.

"We want the State Umno liaison committee chairman to handle the matters of the affected division until a final decision on the appeal is made," he said.

He was speaking after chairing a three-hour Umno supreme council meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Among those who won the division chiefs' post in the April-May divisional elections but have been suspended by the Disciplinary Board are Datuk Abdul Azim Mohd Zabidi (Bukit Bintang), Kamaruddin Mohd Noor (Pasir Puteh), Datuk Yahaya Lampong (Tanjung Aru), Mustafa Kamal Mohd Nawi (Gopeng) and Datuk Zainol Md Isa (Baling).

In Muar, Datuk Abullah Omar won the division chief's post but was found guilty by the Disciplinary Board and replaced by Abdul Malek Munip, who was also found guilty later.

Asked whether Abdul Azim would also have his position as supreme council member revoked, Dr Mahathir said this would only be decided after a final decision was made by the independent body.

He said the independent secretariat would submit its decisions to the supreme council.

On today's meeting, Dr Mahathir said the supreme council also discussed the activities of Kumpulan Militan Malaysia which was bent on establishing Islamic governments in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

"Their ambition is not really to set up a union of Islamic nations but to grab power. Setting up an Islamic nation is secondary ... they want to grab power through violence and overthrow a government which has been recognised as a model Islamic country.

"It is clear that they are not fighting against the enemies of Islam but this is an attempt to overthrow a democratically elected government through violence."

Dr Mahathir said this group was impatient and could not wait to form the government through the democratic process.

He said the council had also discussed ways to neutralise underground militant groups out to topple the Government. However, he did not elaborate on what steps would be taken.

On the proposed meritocracy system for intake of Malay students into local universities, Dr Mahathir said the supreme council decided that for a start, it would only involve those pursuing studies in the fields of

literature, Islamic studies, and science and technology.

"We would not implement the meritocracy system in full yet. We have to ensure that the reduction in the intake of Malay students is not overly done," he said.

He said the entry qualification needed for a Bumiputera student before being allowed to pursue these courses would also be raised.

As for Islamic studies, Dr Mahathir said the courses should centre on the religion and should not feature any political elements like campaigns to oppose or oust the Government.

On whether the Kuala Lumpur International Airport was being used as a transit point for terrorists from Afghanistan to gain entry into other countries, Dr Mahathir said:

"So far, we know that they use the KLIA to smuggle migrants to other countries such as Australia, but I have not received any information on the airport being used for terrorist activities," he said.

On his talks with Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew tomorrow, he said it would focus on bilateral relations.