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Suspension of six endorsed (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Umno supreme council today unanimously endorsed the decision by the party's disciplinary board to suspend six divisional leaders for practising money politics, reflecting its determination to combat the scourge.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the council also decided that no re-elections would be held, and posts won by the offenders would be awarded to the losing candidates.

If there were two or more candidates, the posts would go to the candidate with the next highest votes.

"The council, after lengthy deliberations, is satisfied with the process taken by the board in finding the offenders guilty," the Prime Minister said at a Press conference after chairing a four-hour meeting of the council at Menara Dato Onn.

On May 5, in its first decision since the conclusion of the divisional elections last month, disciplinary board chairman Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen announced that six divisional leaders had been found guilty of money politics.

They were Gopeng division chief Mustafa Kamal Mohd Nawi, the division information chief Mohamad Annuar Baharuddin, Bagan Serai division deputy head Zaki Din, Baling division chief and State Exco member Datuk Zainol Mohd Isa, Selayang division information chief Rahmat Abdullah and Muar division chief and KFC Holdings deputy executive chairman Datuk Abdullah Omar.

They have been suspended for a period ranging from two party elections to six years. The six then submitted their appeals to the council.

Dr Mahathir said the council fully endorsed the board's findings and punishment meted against the offenders, without any changes.

Earlier, Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen appeared before the supreme council to explain the board's findings and decision against the six.

Dr Mahathir also explained that the council felt that it was not practical for it to act as an appeal board.

"The council has many members and there are many cases lodged. It will be a difficult process if it is to act as an appeal board ... so, we will only endorse decisions made by the disciplinary board."

If the six had new evidence to clear them of the charges, he said they could present them for the board's consideration.

Dr Mahathir said if the losing candidates were later found to indulge in money politics, they would also be stripped of their positions.

"The process will be repeated ... if there are no other candidates, we will decide then on the next course of action."

On Government posts held by those found guilty, he said the party's decision should be reflected not only in its "implementation but in spirit".

"If those found guilty are Umno members, I think action to reflect the decision of the board should be taken."

Asked whether this meant Zainol would have to relinquish his post as State executive councillor, he replied: "You can make your own interpretation."

On whether the Kedah Menteri Besar would be expected to adopt the council's decision, he said State Governments led by Umno would "abide" by decisions made by the party.

To curb money politics, Dr Mahathir said all division heads must declare their assets to the party.

"This ruling also applies to aspirant candidates deemed super-rich who plan to contest in future elections."

The council, said Dr Mahathir, agreed that division heads would not be given contracts or to conduct business with the Government. But they were free to conduct business with the private sector. Asked whether this was a blanket ruling, he replied in the affirmative.

On the fate of division heads already active in business, Dr Mahathir said they had to make a choice whether to be active in politics or business.

On Puteri Umno, he said it had been given two weeks to name the pro-tem heads for all divisions.

On the Silam divisional election which had been suspended, he said it had been directed to re-convene the meeting.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the complaints lodged by Beserah Assemblyman Datuk Fauzi Abdul Rahman on money politics in the Kuantan division, to which he said the matter was not discussed at all.

"The final report has not been submitted. So we could not make any decision."

On suggestions that Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob should take leave while allegations against him by Fauzi were investigated, Dr Mahathir said he did not see the reason for Khalil to do so.

"We have not found anything ... we do not decide on the case of anybody like that. What you are suggesting is to find someone guilty before he is tried."