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'Taliban prisoners treated harshly'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Umno supreme council today voiced its protest against the harsh treatment of Taliban prisoners at the American naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Describing the treatment given to the detainees as inhumane, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Umno would ask the Foreign Ministry to send a memorandum to the US Government on the matter.

He said this after chairing the party's supreme council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn.

The Prime Minister said the council also discussed the danger posed by Kumpulan Militan Malaysia, which had resorted to violence to achieve its aim of toppling the Government.

"We have proof of their activities and plans, besides their link to foreign terrorist groups. Members of the group have been identified and appropriate action taken."

Asked whether those arrested would be charged, Dr Mahathir said the proof obtained related to the group's intended plans.

"There has not been any case brought to court on the possibility of one committing a crime. That's why we have a preventive law which is aimed at preventing an offence from being committed.

"Under this law, we have the right to detain offenders without trial. But once we have the proof that they have committed an offence, they would be charged."

Dr Mahathir was also asked on Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat's statement that the Kelantan people who voted for the party in the 1990 general election stood to gain pahala (rewards) as they have contributed to help free the State from usury.

On whether such a claim was detrimental to Muslims and the religion, he said although it was wrong, Pas had never given any consideration to the effects of its action.

"Its main concern is to get support. That's why such claims are made ... they say things as if they are God, they know whether one is going to heaven or hell.

"How do they know. Who has given them the mandate?"

Dr Mahathir said the council also discussed the recent Indera Kayangan by-election which was won by Barisan Nasional.

"We have identified the strengths and weaknesses which will serve as important lessons," he said, while congratulating Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, the Wanita and Youth movements as well as Puteri Umno for their hard work during the by-election.

On party matters, Dr Mahathir said members would be allowed to switch branches ahead of next month's branch elections.

He said members were also free to join any branch of their choice.

"The supreme council has decided there should be no attempt to prevent the admission and switching of membership from the branches."

Meanwhile, deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the council had endorsed the regulations governing Puteri Umno.

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