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Penalties meted out to 10 Umno members upheld (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Umno supreme council today upheld penalties imposed on 10 members for violation of party rules during the April and May divisional elections last year.

The council, which sat as an appeals board, also decided that those guilty would have to relinquish all political posts.

These include seats in the supreme council and State Executive Councils. However, chairmanship of companies is not affected.

One of those affected by today's decision is believed to be supreme council member and former Bukit Bintang division head Datuk Abdul Azim Mohd Zabidi, who was suspended for three years by the disciplinary board for abuse of power.

Sources said others whose appeals were rejected by the council were former Kedah Exco and Bayu Assemblyman Datuk Zainol Md Isa and division heads Jelani Hamdan (Bandau), Datuk Yahaya Lampong (Tanjung Aru) and Datuk Yahya Shafie (Ipoh Timur).

The council also endorsed the penalty imposed on Bukit Bintang secretary Datuk Ruslan Omar, who was suspended for three years.

The 10 cases were part of 27 appeals heard by the council at a special meeting chaired by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

At a Press conference after the two-hour meeting, the Prime Minister said 17 appeals were allowed, in which seven members were cleared of all charges while 10 had their penalties reduced.

But Dr Mahathir did not reveal any names, saying the 27 would be notified of the decision through letters.

Among those who succeeded in their appeals were Benut Assemblyman Salehon Sengot, Jelutong division chief Mohd Nor Hussain and former Muar division chief Abdul Malek Munip - who replaced Datuk Abdullah Omar - but was also later found guilty by the disciplinary board after assuming the post.

Abdullah, Pasir Puteh division chief Datuk Kamaruddin Mohd Nor and Gopeng division head Mustafa Kamal Mohd Nawi were among the 10 who had their penalties reduced.

The members were found guilty by the party's disciplinary board which investigated complaints of misconduct during the party elections.

Some were given warning while others were suspended from either electing, being elected or being appointed to any party position.

Then a special secretariat, headed by Datuk Zuki Kamaluddin, was set up to hear their appeal and to carry out findings to be submitted to the supreme council, which is the highest decision-making body in the party.

Dr Mahathir said in cases involving division heads, the council decided the deputy chiefs would assume the vacated posts.

"The council decided that those found guilty should relinquish all other political positions and not only posts they won (in the elections)."

He said the council arrived at all decisions by consensus, adding it agreed with the approaches adopted by the secretariat in disposing of the appeals.

Asked if members notified of the decision could announce the matter themselves, Dr Mahathir said they could do so.

On the reasons for accepting the seven appeals, the Prime Minister said that the secretariat had studied the cases and decided there were valid reasons to set aside the penalties.

"These cases are not so serious and most of the offenders had only been issued with warnings. We decided even this (warning) is not necessary."

Dr Mahathir said the council also decided that Youth, Wanita and Puteri Umno members were not allowed to have dual membership.

"These movement are separate entities.

"So, a member of one movement cannot at the same time be a member of another movement. They are not allowed to contest positions in a movement of which they are not a member."

For example, a member of Puteri is not allowed to contest posts in Wanita, but free to contest at the branch, division and supreme council levels.

The council also discussed the upcoming Ketari by-election and appointed Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob as BN campaign director.

The Prime Minister was also asked about police investigations into alleged irregularities in the cargo division of Malaysia Airlines.

He said the matter was now in the hands of the police and that they were not bound to submit daily reports on the investigations to him. On whether any progress had been made, he said: "I don't know. You have to ask them yourselves."

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