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Umno recommends sack for duo

Sajahan Waheed; Firdaus Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Umno supreme council has recommended the expulsion of the two MCA Penang backbenchers who abstained from voting on a motion tabled by the Opposition in the State Assembly last week to postpone the construction of the RM1.02 billion Penang Outer Ring Road.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the decision on the future of the duo, however, would be made by the Barisan Nasional supreme council which would meet in January.

"We leave it to BN to make a final decision on the matter. As for Umno's stand, we feel the duo must be expelled," he said after chairing the council meeting at the party headquarters here today.

Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) and Tan Cheng Liang (Jawi) came under fire from various quarters, including Dr Mahathir, and his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who described their action as a serious breach of party discipline.

On another matter, Dr Mahathir, who is Prime Minister, said Umno has decided to postpone its party elections scheduled to be held next June to after the next general election.

He said the postponement was to enable party members to concentrate on preparations for the next general election which is scheduled for November 2004.

"This decision was made by the supreme council which is empowered to postpone the party election for a period of up to 18 months.

"We do not want to obstruct party members from working for the general election. We hope the postponement will give them time to work hard and be prepared for the general election.

"It is not known when the general election will be held."

In 1999, Umno postponed its party elections scheduled to be held in June to after the general election. The general election was held in Nov 1999, and the party election in May 2000.

Asked whether holding party positions would be a criterion for one to be selected to contest in the general election, Dr Mahathir replied: "No, that is not the situation. There are many, including members of the Press, who have contested in the general election but are not holding any party position.

"It has never been our practice that only party members be selected as candidates for the general election."

Dr Mahathir said the Opposition was in a difficult position as the 2.8 million potential voters in the general election who had their constituencies switched (by the Opposition) were now back in their original location.

"They won in the last election through this type of tactic, otherwise they would not have won."

Dr Mahathir said the supreme council had directed the disciplinary board to call up all party members who lodged police reports against other members, in keeping with party procedures.

"If there is any police report made against another party member, then the complainant must be called up by the disciplinary board for explanation.

"We might take action against the person, including expelling him from the party."

On the proposed National Service which is to be introduced in 2004, Dr

Mahathir said Umno fully supported it and felt that a detailed study was needed on the method of implementation.

Later, Dr Mahathir joined some 2,000 BN component party divisional, Wanita, Youth and Puteri leaders in breaking fast at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Dr Mahathir also announced that Datuk Khalid Yunus had been made Deputy Entrepreneur Development Minister. Khalid was Deputy Information Minister.

This followed the recent elevation of Datuk Zainuddin Maidin from Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Minister in the Information Ministry.

Datuk Rizalman Abdullah is the Information Ministry Parliamentary Secretary. He was Entrepreneur Development Ministry Parliamentary Secretary.