

Bigger say for grassroot

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By SABRY SHARIF

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — The move by the new Umno last night to give a candidate for president or deputy president 10 votes each time he is nominated for either posts is to give more weight to divisional level choices.

The decision by the special general assembly of the party to amend its constitution was "to uphold the majority consensus of grass-root members on the leaders that they want," party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said after chairing a meeting of the Supreme Council last night.

"We do not want a few individuals influencing a majority of the estimated 1,400 delegates to vote for their choice of leaders at the triennial party elections.

"This is especially so when it conflicts with the grassroots' majority consensus on the choice of president and deputy president as reflected in the divisions' nominations.

"Why should we let a few people influence delegates when Umno is a party of 1.4 million members, not 1,400 delegates?"

Dr Mahathir cited the last general assembly of the de-registered Umno on April 24 last year as an example.

He said the candidates nominated for president

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and deputy president received more than 80 nominations from divisions.

"But when it came to the election proper, the votes did not tally with the nominations.

"This does not mean that the people at the grassroots do not support these candidates, but that the delegates had not fulfilled the mandate given to them by members."

A four-hour special general assembly preceded the Supreme Council meeting.

The new Umno now has 35 members — 34 members of the Supreme Council and Tanjung Puteri Assemblyman Datuk Yunus Sulaiman.

Dr Mahathir said divisional delegates had not voted according to the aspirations of their grassroots last April because they had fallen victim to "bad politics" perpetrated by a few.

"To resolve this problem, the special general assembly has withdrawn some of the enormous voting power of the delegates and handed it over to the divisions through the automatic 10 votes each for the candidates nominated by them."

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He also announced that the other major amendment to the party constitution approved by the special general assembly was that there would be no election for the posts of Umno Youth and Wanita heads and deputy heads.

"We have seen many unhealthy practices during the election of Umno Youth and Wanita heads and deputy heads. We think this amendment will reduce the politicking significantly."

Youth and Wanita heads will be accorded vice-president status in the Supreme Council as was the case in the de-registered Umno.

Dr Mahathir said the amendments were necessary to avoid the intense politicking experienced by the de-registered Umno.

Specifically, he wants the practice of money politics, lobbying for votes through *kenduris* and other social functions and closed-door *ceramahs* stopped.

Other significant amendments approved were:

- The number of delegates from the Youth and Wanita wings will be 30 each (under the constitution of the de-registered Umno, the number of delegates was limited to five each); and,

- The Supreme Council has the power to approve the application of a prospective member who had been refused membership at the divisional level.

Dr Mahathir parried Press remarks that the amendments might result in his opponents accusing him of approving undemocratic amendments.

"The divisions may vote for candidates other than the incumbent president and deputy president, while the heads and deputy heads of Umno Youth and Wanita will be appointed from among the elected 133 divisional Youth and Wanita heads and deputy heads.

"The appointment of State Youth and Wanita heads and deputy heads will continue to be the responsibility of these two movements' national executive committees."