

PM: Attorney-General studying proposal to amend Election Act

Move to curb by-elections

By SABRY SHARIF

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — The Attorney-General is studying a proposal by the Government to amend the Election Act to stop MPs and State Assemblymen from vacating their seats without good reasons.

Disclosing this today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government proposed that by-elections only be held in the event of death, illness, and physical disability.

MPs and Assemblymen cannot resign and force by-elections for other reasons, he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Attorney-General had not been given a deadline to complete the study.

Computer error

He was speaking to newsmen after having tea at Parliament House with Mr Leong Chee Kong, a partially blind man who has without fail attended Dewan Rakyat sittings since 1964.

The proposal to stop elected representatives from forcing by-elections by resigning was raised by various quarters, including Umno members, following the resignation of Datuk Shahrir Samad, who gave up his Johore Baru seat last year.

He contested in the by-election as an Independent.

Many felt that when a person was elected, he should complete his term, adding that unwarranted resignations to test one's popularity and electoral support was a waste of

time and public funds.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said State Umno liaison committees had been directed to rectify problems faced by party members unable to attend branch annual general meetings because their names were not in the branches' membership lists.

"The party headquarters has delegated powers to the State Umno liaison committees to take measures to resolve this problem."

Asked if these measures include allowing members who could produce receipts of their paid subscription fees to attend the meetings, he said this was for the State Umno liaison committees to consider.

He did not know how many Umno branches faced such problems but expressed confidence that the State Umno liaison committees could resolve them.

He was commenting on reports of confusion at Umno branch meetings in Muar, where those who had renewed their membership in the party before March 31 were unable to attend as their names were not in the branch membership lists.

Also, all 44 branches in the Johore Baru Umno division have not been able to hold their meetings as the membership of some 4,200 people had not been verified.

Yesterday, Umno deputy president Abdul Ghafar Baba attributed the problem to a computer error and assured the affected members that it would be corrected.

He also said that any branch or division meeting which became deadlocked over the question of its membership list be postponed.

Encik Ghafar, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, said the Umno organising committee would meet to discuss this problem after the Teluk Pasu by-election.