

Committee under Dr Mahathir given power to curb Panel on Umno pol.

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Umno has set up an ad hoc committee to review the party's election process at all levels following allegations of wrongdoings during the current divisional elections.

The party's supreme council decided on the need for the committee, to be headed by party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, at its supreme council meeting here this afternoon.

Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after the 2½ hour meeting that among other things, the committee has been given the power to draw up new regulations pertaining to the election process or "take other measures deemed necessary" to curb unhealthy practices.

He said based on reports and allegations, the wrongdoings included the practice of money politics and the participation of non-members in party elections at branch and divisional levels.

He also did not rule out the possibility of further amendments to the Umno constitution should the panel find a need for this.

As head of the committee, Dr Mahathir has been given absolute power to appoint the members which, he said, would number about 10 or 12, including the party secretary-general, Datuk Mohamed Rahmat.

These members would be picked from the supreme council or even those from outside the council.

The party president said the committee would start to function "as soon as possible" though the timing of its formation would mean that it would have to deal with future cases and not those that had cropped up

during the current divisional elections.

He said one of its immediate tasks, as suggested during the meeting, was to organise courses to instil a new culture and sense of values among members.

Asked why it had to be necessary to form the committee, Dr Mahathir said this was due to the many problems (*kepinancangan*) that had surfaced in the branch and divisional elections and which might spread to supreme council elections.

Dr Mahathir was then asked what the major problems were, to which he replied: "There have been allegations about money and the participation of non-members in the election process as well as members resorting to unhealthy practices."

Asked whether the formation of the ad hoc committee indicated that the management and disciplinary committees, both of which were chaired by deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, were ineffective, Dr Mahathir said the move was not an attempt to pit him against Anwar.

"The committee has a completely different role... The management committee has a lot of responsibilities to handle administrative matters and hear complaints and grouses of members (pertaining to party elections)," he added.

Anwar was not present at today's meeting as he is now in New York, leading a road show on the Malaysian capital market and to attend the annual World Bank meeting in Washington.

Dr Mahathir also said allegations of money politics were still being made despite the introduction of a code of ethics for the party and the convening of a spe-

unhealthy practices

Is set up

Not wrong to amend party rules, says Dr Mahathir

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cial general assembly to discuss the matter.

On the possibility of another amendment to the Umno constitution, he said it was not wrong to resort to this as guidelines drawn up by man were bound to contain weaknesses.

He said the last amendment to the constitution (last year) would have been more effective in curbing unhealthy practices if complaints received were backed by sufficient evidence.

To a question concerning allegations by Kuah Assemblyman Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid recently that there had been "outside interference" to spoil his bid for the post of Langkawi divisional head, Dr Mahathir said the supreme council did not deliberate on this as it had not received such report.

Replying to questions by foreign reporters on whether speculation that Dr Mahathir was losing his grip on power was accurate, the Prime Minister said this was the assumption of the foreign Press.

He said they made the assumption because Umno treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin and Sanusi, who were seen as his supporters, had not retained their positions as divisional heads.

Dr Mahathir said this had led them to imply that he had lost his grip on the party.

"It is up to the foreign Press to interpret but I think the local Press knows better."

Asked how he felt about his leadership after today's meeting given the speculation about his position, Dr Mahathir said:

"I feel the same ... the past 14 years since I have been Prime Minister there have been lots of speculation on how I am losing my grip; even before I became Prime Minister, there were lots of talk.

"As far as I am concerned, I am still young."

On his relations with Anwar, Dr Mahathir said: "He (Anwar) is my pal, we are good friends and we work together much better perhaps than some European leaders with their number two."

Asked on claims by supreme council members that there were people wanting to contest the post of deputy president despite the decision of the council that there would be no contest for the seat in next year's general assembly, he said in jest: "Let me know the name of the supreme council members. I'll arrest them ... these are only claims by the Press."

On comments by chairman of the United Nations Commission on Basic Human Rights Tan Sri Musa Hitam that it was important to take into consideration the views of the people in determining whether or not the Sabah Chief Minister's post should be rotated, he said Musa had the right to voice his opinions.

"My opinion is that we will honour what has been promised unless all parties agree otherwise."