

Dr M: Time needed to deliberate on party's weakn

Panel to take six

By Syed Nadzri and Rashid Yusof

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The Umno ad hoc committee set up recently to review the party constitution and regulations hopes to come up with its findings and recommendations in six months.

Prime Minister and party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also chairman of the committee, said the 11-member panel which met for the first time this afternoon, needed this duration to correct weaknesses and the impression some people had of the party.

"Our task is generally to improve the image of Umno because the general feeling is that the situation in the party is not all that comforting (*tidak menyenangkan*)," he told Press conference after chairing the two-hour meeting at the party headquarters here.

He said within the party, there were, however, feelings to the contrary where members believed the negative perceptions were due to reports both in the foreign and local Press.

was set up by the Umno supreme council at its meeting on Oct 6 to counter allegations of wrongdoings during the party elections at various levels.

The committee has been given the power to draw up new regulations pertaining to the election process or take measures deemed necessary to curb unhealthy practices.

Besides Dr Mahathir, others in the committee are deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, and supreme council members Tun Daim Zainuddin, Abdul Ghani Othman, Datuk Salleh Tun Said and Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman.

Four party veterans in the panel are Tan Sri Kamarul Ariffin Mohamed Yassin, Tan Sri Aishah Abdul Ghani, Tan Sri Azahari Taib and Tan Sri Abdul Samad Idris.

Dr Mahathir said today's meeting discussed in broad terms the "problems" it had to deal with and the procedures that needed to be included in its terms of reference. He said the inclusion of several veteran party members was necessary as

esses, present findings

months

These reports, he said, gave the impression that Umno members were indisciplined and that the party was going out of control.

He said the committee conceded that there were changes within Umno which had to be addressed so that the party could be back on the right track "which is to safeguard the interests of the Malays and Bumiputeras as well as fight for the interest of the nation".

"The committee is of the opinion that we need time to deliberate and submit our findings to the supreme council. We need at least six months to tackle this.

"We believe that the respective State liaison committees should also organise courses and seminars to tackle grouses that are brought up and give opportunity to the divisions to provide feedback to this committee."

Dr Mahathir said the panel would vet the opinions to decide which of them needed to be included in its report to the supreme council.

The ad hoc committee

these people had much to offer in terms of experience.

"(But) there are also relatively new party members in the committee...and I am like a referee. I know there are some quarters who believe that others, too, should be given a chance to voice their opinions through their divisions. We will listen to the views of all."

Asked when the committee would hold its next meeting, Dr Mahathir said it would meet "regularly" and would try to complete its task within six months.

He said as the party would convene its general assembly on Nov 24, the committee would meet after the assembly.

He added that supreme council members had given some ideas before the committee was formed and they had been conveyed to the panel members to be deliberated on.

Asked to elaborate on the committee's terms of reference, Dr Mahathir said it had been given the task to

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Dr M: Final decision is with Umno supreme council

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review not only the constitution but everything else concerning the party's image.

On whether the old Umno spirit could be revived within the six-month period, he said: "We will try."

On the proposed State-level seminars, Dr Mahathir said they would be conducted by the State liaison committees and would involve the respective division heads who would in turn discuss with their divisions to get feedback.

To another question, Dr

Mahathir said the ad hoc committee would submit all its findings and recommendations in six months and not "in bits and pieces".

On whether party courses would be made compulsory to new members, he said no decision was made on that, but it was one of the ideas

tabled at the meeting.

Asked whether the bonus vote system was one of the areas to be discussed, Dr Mahathir said the committee would touch on all matters but was not committed to anything as the final decision was with the supreme council.

Asked on the severity of the problems in the party, he said some quarters viewed them as serious while others perceived that they had been blown out of proportion by the Press.

On what he personally thought of the matter, he said: "I have no opinion."