

Umno to show it can weather crises

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Solid backing for Dr M expected at assembly

By SHAMSUL AKMAR

KUALA LUMPUR: Tomorrow is one of those rare occasions when Umno holds a special general assembly to amend the party constitution.

The amendments are aimed at tightening the party election process and combating money politics.

The last time Umno had such an extraordinary general meeting was in 1994, and its specific objective was to counter money politics.

This time around, the special assembly is being held amid the simmering issue of the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as deputy prime minister and Umno deputy president.

-Despite the upheaval, the party is expected to emerge from the meeting as united as before.

According to Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik, 17 articles in the party constitution will be up for amendment at the one-day assembly.

Among the provisions, one that will be repealed is the 10 bonus votes that accompany every nomination received by candidates for the posts of president and deputy president.

In its place, a provision will be inserted requiring a candidate for the president's post to secure nominations from at least 30% of the divisions, while a contender for deputy president must secure at

least 20%.

Another significant amendment will be the condition that a member can only contest in branch elections after being an Umno member for at least two years.

The membership period is three years for divisional and supreme council posts.

While these amendments will be the main aspects of discussion during the assembly, the meeting is expected to be the platform for Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to call for unity.

The gathering itself, the first since Anwar's sacking more than three months ago, should serve as testimony of how Umno is capable of weathering an unpre-

cedented political storm of such magnitude.

Apart from that, the assembly is also expected to see the delegates re-affirm their commitment to Umno's struggle under Dr Mahathir's leadership.

A discussion on foreign interference in Malaysia's domestic affairs by such figures as US Vice-President Al Gore and currency speculator George Soros is also expected.

Despite Dr Mahathir's remarks that no other issue will be discussed during the assembly other than the constitutional changes, some delegates are still expecting the matter of an appointment of a deputy prime minister to be raised.