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No contest advice for top two posts (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Umno Supreme Council today advised members to avoid promoting contests for the top two posts in the party to avoid intense campaigning which could lead to disunity.

The council today unanimously proposed that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad be re-nominated as president while vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi be nominated to fill the vacant deputy president's post.

Speaking at a Press conference after a four-hour council meeting chaired by Dr Mahathir, who is also Prime Minister, secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said council members on their part were unanimous in their wish to see no contest for the posts.

The council, which held its first meeting for the new year today, also fixed May 11, 12 and 13 for the General Assembly. This will be preceded by the Youth and Wanita delegates' conferences on May 10.

"All state liaison heads have agreed on this and have been asked to convey this to the branches and divisions which will hold their meetings soon to nominate candidates for the various party posts."

The divisions and branches have been given six weeks from Jan 16 to conclude their annual meetings.

Responding to a question, Khalil said the council's decision to propose Dr Mahathir's re-nomination and Abdullah's nomination as the deputy was not a directive that party divisions should follow.

He said it was only the council's stand based on the unanimous wish of the Supreme Council that Dr Mahathir continue to lead Umno.

Asked whether the council's decision was a directive, Dr Mahathir said it was only an advice.

When asked who among the council members made the proposals, Dr Mahathir replied: "We had an open discussion, that's all. This is the consensus. We don't identify the people when a decision is unanimous and we don't point fingers at anyone."

On what would happen if divisions failed to follow the advice, Dr Mahathir replied: "It is an advice, that's it."

To another question, he said the no-contest consensus was not the result of any resolution or proposal from any member of the council.

"There is no resolution. We discussed it openly and arrived at a consensus."

Khalil, at this point, explained that the discussion was initiated by members themselves, and the council later made a stand on it.

Asked if this meant that Abdullah, who is carrying out the duties of deputy president, would automatically assume the post which had been vacant following the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the party in September 1998, Dr Mahathir said:

"The council decided that there should not be any contest for the post, which means that the candidate who will receive its support to fill the position is Abdullah."

As for the other posts at stake in the election, Dr Mahathir expressed hope that the campaign would not be too intense.

On the three-day assembly, Dr Mahathir said May 11 was chosen to coincide with the party's 54th anniversary.

Because of this, the three-day assembly will end on a Saturday instead of a Sunday as is the normal practice.

The Youth and Wanita wings will hold their respective assemblies on May 10.

On party matters, Dr Mahathir said the council had endorsed the appointments of three Menteri Besar and one Chief Minister as liaison heads of their respective States.

They are for the States of Malacca (Datuk Mohamed Ali Rustam), Perak (Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali), Pahang (Datuk Adnan Yaakob) and Kedah (Datuk Syed Razak Syed Zain). The status in the other States remain unchanged.

The Prime Minister added that the deputy heads would be appointed after the general assembly.

Dr Mahathir said Umno had also decided to organise information sessions for all members, chiefly to further explain to them the party's struggle.

Special courses will be held for trainers, with one session to be attended by council members who would give their input on various problems and matters concerning the party and the country.

Dr Mahathir said the programme would also be used by the party to verify and update its membership list.

He advised members to be more committed to the party, not to jockey for positions and to show loyalty to the party and not individuals.

The Prime Minister said the relationship with ulama would be continued and he would meet them again to discuss various matters which had been raised during the general election.

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