

20/09/2000

Streamlined Umno polls by 2003 (HL)

Ramlan Said; Ainon Mohd; Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The first Umno elections for the branch, division and supreme council to be held in the same year will most likely take place in 2003, deputy party president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said initial feedback from members on possible amendments to the party constitution showed strong support for the elections to be streamlined and carried out in the same year to curb too much politicking.

Branch, division and supreme council elections are now conducted in separate years with office bearers serving a three-year term. The next branch-level election is scheduled in 2002; division next year; and the supreme council in 2003.

What's certain now, said the Deputy Prime Minister, was that the division election would proceed as scheduled next year.

Abdullah was speaking at a Press conference after briefing divisional leaders on amendments to the party's constitution at the Putra World Trade Centre.

A special committee reviewing the constitution, headed by vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, has been set up to collate and vet proposals on the amendments.

The amendments will be tabled at a special one-day general assembly in November.

The current practice where branch, division and supreme council hold their election in separate year has led to complaints that members spend too much time politicking instead of concentrating on other activities.

On whether there would be any difficulties to streamline the elections, Abdullah said: "We will adjust ... it is not a difficult or impossible task to do so."

Asked whether the date of the general election - the current term of Parliament ends in 2004 - would have any bearing on the party elections, Abdullah said the "we will cross the bridge when the time comes".

On the number of proposals received to date, Abdullah said the party was still awaiting response from divisions.

"What has been received by the headquarters so far is not conclusive yet," he said.

Abdullah was also asked whether any decision on the structure of Puteri Umno, whose membership is open to women below 35, had been made.

No definite decision had been made to date, he said, but expressed confidence that the matter would be resolved at the supreme council meeting next month.

"We want to do it as soon as possible as the structure has to be included in the constitution."

The proposal to establish Puteri Umno has caused "dissension" among Wanita Umno, with some wanting it to follow the format of Umno Youth while others preferred that it functions as a club.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced last July that the party would set up a new wing, Pasukan Puteri Umno, equivalent to Umno Youth.

The proposal was mooted to cater for young women interested in joining the party but were quite uncomfortable with Wanita Umno, which they perceived as being made up of older members.

Wanita Umno head Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz had early this month announced

that Puteri Umno would not have a formal structure of a political wing, but instead co-exist as a club.

She argued that having a formal structure was not feasible and that it might cause division within the movement.

Wanita deputy head Datuk Sharizat Jalil, who was present at the Press conference, clarified that the proposal to set up Puteri Umno was welcomed by the movement.

"It is true that Rafidah has gone on record that Puteri Umno would be set up as a club but that's not the end. A club is just one of the many suggestions ... don't jump to any conclusion, what's important is not the name but the structure."

(END)