

17/01/2000

Umno branches begin AGMs

Marhalim Abas

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - As more Umno leaders are making public their intention to vie for the party posts, some 6,000 branches and 165 divisions in the country are set to hold their annual general meetings.

From today to April 30, they will nominate their candidates for all posts - from the president to the 25 supreme council members.

The meetings will be completed ahead of the general assembly and polls in May.

Branches started their meetings from today to Feb 29 while the divisions must hold theirs from March 1 to April 30.

Although there will not be any election at the branch and divisional levels this time, these meetings are crucial because it will determine the nominations for the various posts and select the 2,000 delegates who will vote in the polls on May 11, the first day of the three-day general assembly.

These delegates represent the wishes and aspirations of the 2.7 million members. The election, originally due last year, was postponed to enable Umno to concentrate on the Nov 29 general election.

To qualify for the party polls, members are required to get at least 30 per cent of the nominations from the divisions to contest the president's post, 25 per cent for the deputy president's post, 20 per cent for the vice-presidents' posts and 10 per cent for the supreme council posts.

But with the president's and deputy president's posts unlikely to be contested, the focus has shifted to the fight for the three vice-presidents' slots.

The scenario came in the wake of the supreme council's advice to the divisions to renominate Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the president's post and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as the deputy president.

There has been speculation that the deputy president's post will see a contest. No one, however, has so far declared his intention.

As it is, a challenger - if there is any - will only be known once the divisional meetings get under way.

For the vice-presidents' posts, several Cabinet Ministers have expressed their intention to contest.

They are Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

The incumbents are Abdullah, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib.

It is still uncertain whether Muhammad is keen to defend his position. He has been on leave from performing his duties as vice-president since 1997 to sort out some legal matters.

The election for the Umno Youth and Wanita chiefs' posts on May 10 is also another interesting event.

Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, who is Umno Youth acting chief, is expected to contest the post left vacant by Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi in 1998.

So far, all indications are that Hishammuddin will win easily, even if there is a contest.

A more interesting contest will be for the Wanita Umno chief's post as

both former Wanita head Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and deputy chairman Datuk Napsiah Omar are expected to challenge incumbent Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman.

Yesterday, Rafidah said she was willing to be nominated.

(END)