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Umno to discuss amendments (HL)

Nuraina Samad

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Two days before its special general assembly, Umno supreme council meets tomorrow to fine-tune and further discuss proposed amendments to the party constitution.

Two proposals, the extension of tenure of council members from three to five years and the proposed formation of Puteri Umno as a separate entity to Wanita Umno, are expected to be further scrutinised at the meeting.

The council is also expected to discuss a popular proposal from the grassroots which the council rejected - the election of supreme council at division-level and the abolition of the percentage system (of nominations) for candidates contesting the party's top posts.

All did not seem well following the council's announcement last month of the proposed amendments to be tabled at the special assembly.

A division head said this was because there had been a consensus on the proposal for the party elections to be held at the division-level, the rationale being that the election of party leaders should reflect the wishes of the majority of party members.

He said this was significant in efforts to further democratise the party and at the same time help repair Umno's "elitist image" of a party that was not reaching out to the grassroots.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told a Press conference after the council meeting last month that the proposal was rejected because of "logistic problems".

Party members were also unhappy that the council had rejected "the common proposal" for the percentage system to be scrapped.

A division chief said many members were puzzled why this was rejected as this proposal was "a common stand" made known to the special committee studying the amendments headed by party vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin which went on a nationwide tour to obtain feedback from the ground.

He said many were confounded by the fact that the proposals to extend the supreme council's tenure and the formation of Puteri Umno "had come from the council itself and not from the grassroots."

Many members feel that there is no need for an extension (of tenure) as the existing status has proven to be working well.

Division heads cited several implications, among which were that it would kill democracy and that it would turn away younger members, the very people Umno wants to attract.

Aware of the dissenting voices, party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi met all division heads on Sunday to gain their feedback, giving an assurance that the supreme council would look into their objections.

He also said the party management meeting would thoroughly study these proposals.

Meanwhile, a Johor Umno leader sprang a surprise when he filed a notice with the party headquarters on Friday that he would be tabling an individual motion to oppose these proposals.

Adam Hamid, Senai division chief, told reporters today that he was confident he would get support from the delegates, thus denying the supreme council the two-thirds needed to have the resolutions passed.

In the wake of this development, many Umno members have taken a positive view, saying that "it means democracy is still alive."

"The leadership is responding to dissenting voices. This is a good

sign," a division head said.

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