

Umno forms indep

Nst 2 0 JUL 2001

Abdullah: Body to act as panel to hear

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. The Umno supreme council has decided to form an independent secretariat, which would act as an appeals panel, to hear grouses against recent action meted out by the party's disciplinary board.

Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the supreme council, which met today, had agreed to appoint Datuk Mohd Zuki Kamaluddin to head the secretariat.

"Zuki will be the chief and he

will have to recruit the rest of the members, hear and study the appeals, and forward warranted cases to the MT (supreme council) for consideration.

"The supreme council would act as an appeals board for such cases," Abdullah, who is also the management committee chairman, said.

Asked when the secretariat would start operating, Abdullah said: "Very soon, very soon ... if possible we wanted it to start yesterday, I will ask Zuki to expedite this."

Zuki is a former Pahang State Assembly Speaker and former State

Assemblyman for Bentà, who was later appointed as a Dewan Negara senator.

He is also a member of the Umno technical committee.

Abdullah, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, was speaking at a joint Press conference with party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad after a three-hour supreme council meeting today.

So far the party's disciplinary board, which was set up to check and act on practices of money politics and other unhealthy acts during the run-up to recent branch and divisional elections, had acted

endentsecretariat

grouses against disciplinary action

against 21 leaders and members for indulging in money politics.

Twelve of them (mostly division heads, deputy heads, youth chiefs and deputy chiefs) were suspended and barred from contesting in future party elections for a stipulated period, while another nine, including two supreme council members, were strictly reprimanded.

More than 70 others were found not guilty of the allegations against them.

The strict disciplinary board action drew criticism from several of those effected and during the last general assembly the matter was widely deliberated upon.

Dr Mahathir, at a Press conference on the conclusion of the general assembly on June 23, said that the council would look into the setting up of the appeals panel, as proposed by disciplinary board chairman Tan Sri Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen.

Dr Mahathir promised that the matter would be discussed in the first supreme council meeting after the assembly (today's meeting).

In a related matter, Abdullah said the council had also decided to ignore complaints, allegations or reports pertaining to Umno divisional delegates meetings if such actions were taken more than a

month after the meetings.

"This means that now there will be a cut-off date, a cut-off point which is exactly a month after the meetings ... after that point we will not accept or consider any more complaints," he explained.

He said that such regulations were necessary as even until today the disciplinary board still continued to receive complaints alleging malpractices at divisional meetings that were conducted more than two months ago.

The council had also decided that Puteri Umno would continue with its pro-tern status until the end of the year.