

Umno veeps want party polls postponed

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KUALA LUMPUR: Umno vice-presidents Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin agree that the party elections be postponed if they fall too close to an early general election.

The three-year term of office for the current Umno supreme council ends in November 2003 while the Parliament term ends in 2004.

However, Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had been dropping hints since early this year about the possibility of an early general election.

Muhammad said it would be best if the party polls were held after a suitable period of time following the general election.

"This is to ensure that members are able to concentrate fully on the general election and also to prevent splits within the party.

"If the party election is held before the general election, there is always a possibility that Barisan Nasional's performance may be blighted by cases of sabotage by Umno members not happy with the outcome of the party election," he said.

Muhammad said he would give his full support if the gen-

eral election is held before the party election as Umno was currently in a very strong position to influence a record performance for Barisan under Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership.

He said since the 1999 general election, Umno had been successful in rehabilitating its image, restored the peoples' faith in the party and improved its image among the international community.

"Timing is very important because Barisan needs to win big. Every Umno members must give his full concentration towards ensuring that that Barisan will do better than in 1999 and wrest back Kelantan and Terengganu from PAS," he said.

Muhyiddin said the latest amendment to Umno's constitution allowed the party's poll to be postponed by 18 months from the last date that it was supposed to be held, provided there was compelling reason for the postponement.

"However, as of today, there is no such decision. Only the party president, together with the supreme council, can decide on that," he added.

Muhyiddin said he fully agreed that if the timing for the general election was set too close to Nov 2003, it would be better for the party polls to

be postponed.

His stand, he said, was in line with the spirit of the constitution and the reason why it was amended in 2000.

"Otherwise, members would be too exhausted to give their full concentration to work for the general election. Then there is the problem of juggling for seats and this can affect Barisan's chances," he added.

In Kuala Klawang, Negri Sembilan Umno chief Tan Sri Mohamed Isa Abdul Samad said:

"If the general election was round the corner, then the party election should be postponed."

"We are concerned that a split can be caused in Umno as members will be concentrating on the party election," he said after this the groundbreaking ceremony of the Jelebu community college at Kampung Sepri yesterday.

In Kangar, Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said Umno's performance during the general elections could be affected if it coincided with its party election year.

Shahidan said in the past, Umno lost ground in by-elections because of internal infighting rather than the might of the opposition.