

16/06/2004

## Ensuring a level playing field

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Umno's top two leaders are going all out to ensure that there is a level playing field for the party elections in September.

The two Umno divisions headed by acting president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his deputy, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, will not nominate anyone to contest the three vice-president positions and 25 elected slots to the supreme council.

Najib, when asked about this today, agreed that nominations by the two divisions could influence delegates. Certain leaders may also be offended by the nominations which can be misconstrued as endorsement, he added.

Nevertheless, no final decision has been made on the matter by his division.

"We have not decided yet. There are views (for both divisions) to be neutral but I have also yet to discuss this with the acting party president," he said after launching the Along Bijak television programme.

Abdullah heads the Kepala Batas division in Penang while Najib leads the Pekan division in Pahang.

Divisional meetings will take place between July 8 and July 22.

The Kepala Batas division meeting will be held on July 17 while the date for the division meeting in Pekan has not been decided.

All divisions are free to nominate anyone for the positions being contested but the supreme council recently proposed that no contest be held for the post of president and deputy president.

In the past, Umno delegates gave undue weightage to nominations forwarded by the divisions headed by the Umno president and deputy president. They have interpreted the choice of the division as an endorsement by the top leadership.

Four years ago, when the Kubang Pasu division nominated three names for the vice-president positions, it was immediately taken by the grassroots as a signal that the then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad wanted party delegates to support the trio.

This was seen as putting the other six candidates for the vice-president positions at a disadvantage. In 1993 and 1996, the Kubang Pasu division wanted to be seen as neutral and did not nominate anyone. But in 2000, the supreme council directed all division to send in their list of nominations.

Umno will elect its new leadership during its general assembly from Sept 22 to 24. The party leadership wants to make this election a clean and fair one.

Party members have been told to cease all social or study tours at home and abroad. They are also not allowed to distribute cards and letters or to solicit funds or sponsor any party activities.

The Umno code of ethics on campaigning is aimed at ensuring that there is no money politics, abuse of power, use of high-handed tactics or force and any form of gratification.

Candidates and their agents cannot use the media to promote themselves or run down other candidates.

The move by the Kepala Batas and Pekan divisions to stay silent on nominations is another move to keep the polls clean and fair.

(END)