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Accept decision, members told (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Umno members should accept the recently-announced pro-tem committees for the 191 divisions as a decision made in the interest of the party, acting party president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said the decision was made after much deliberation and thought.

"If there are still those who do not want to accept the decision of the Umno supreme council, what are we to do?"

"This is a decision of the party leadership after much deliberation," he said at a Press conference at his Hari Raya open house at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Abdullah said the list of names for the pro-tem committees was handed to the Umno management committee about two months ago. He said the management committee unanimously agreed to the list before handing it to the supreme council.

"Though there were lengthy discussions among the supreme council members, we all came to a consensus in the end.

"This is not about personal interests, but that of the party and the Barisan Nasional as a whole."

On Saturday, Abdullah, who is also the Prime Minister, announced the pro-tem committee line-up for all Umno divisions. Among divisions which saw changes was Kubang Pasu where division head Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was replaced by former Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff.

Abdullah had said that Dr Mahathir had expressed his intention not to hold any party post when he stepped down as the Prime Minister and Umno president last month.

There were new heads in six other divisions. Most incumbent division heads were retained though some were picked to head new divisions created under the redelineation exercise of parliamentary boundaries.

Kelantan saw the most changes with four new division heads named.

On Sunday, former Pasir Mas Umno division chief Datuk Ibrahim Ali had said that he was disappointed over his removal.

He had added that he had not expected the supreme council to remove him just like that, in view of his contributions to the party.

Ibrahim, 52, division chief for the past 10 years, was replaced by Datuk Abdul Rahim Abd Rahman.

On the supreme council's decision to allow the divisional heads to appoint five extra members to the pro-tem committees, Abdullah said it was to strengthen the party machinery.

"Becoming a member of the pro-tem committee does not necessarily mean one is going to be selected as a candidate for the next general election," he said. Asked if the changes in Kelantan would help the BN wrest the State back from Pas, he said what was important was for all members to work hard to face the general election. "We hope we can win back the State."

He said there were still many who considered Umno as relevant.

"Though some people are happy with the party on the whole, what is important is the ability and credibility of its leaders.

"People do not want those without credibility and it is vital that Umno leaders must be able to effectively carry out the responsibilities given to them."

On the ongoing dispute between the MIC and the Indian Progressive Front,

Abdullah said he did not like to see such a public exchange of accusations.

"The IPF sees the MIC as the party blocking its entry into the BN.

"If this kind of bickering continues, it will not benefit both parties or anyone at all. We hope they can respect each other."

IPF president Datuk M.G. Pandithan has criticised MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu over a number of issues affecting the Indian community, including the Maika Holdings share issue.

"I do not know how to resolve the problem between the two parties ...let us wait and see. I am not making any promises," said Abdullah.

On when would be a good time for the appointment of a new Deputy Prime Minister, he said in jest: "The time to appoint is a good time."