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`No need for endorsements'

Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Umno acting president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told Umno divisions today to refrain from openly endorsing anyone as the party's next deputy president or Deputy Prime Minister.

Abdullah, who is acting Prime Minister, said such endorsements could lead to those nominated to campaign for the posts.

"If one division starts indicating support for a particular person, others might follow with their own resolutions. It will then lead to campaigning," he said at a Press conference at the Parliament lobby here.

He was asked to comment on a resolution by the Chenderoh division that vice-president Datuk Seri Mohamed Najib Razak be appointed Umno deputy president and Deputy Prime Minister.

"That's their opinion. But I think there is no need now for divisions to pass any resolutions."

Earlier, he tabled a motion supporting proposals by the Election Commission to create 25 new parliamentary seats and 63 state seats.

Abdullah said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had already stated that the leadership succession would be decided by him (Abdullah).

"Also, concerning my deputy in the party, we have agreed that party elections be held after the general election. This (decision) must be acknowledged by divisions."

On whether disputes among component parties in the Barisan Nasional could affect it in the next general election, Abdullah remarked that "they are all responsible leaders".

"They know there are certain things that will cause problems if they differ (in opinion). But I believe they will not go to the extent of jeopardising BN chances in the general election.

"I have always spoken on the need for coalition members to remain strong and problems to be resolved fast, besides avoiding intraparty disputes.

"I hope such disputes will stop," he said, in obvious reference to bickering between MIC leaders and People's Progressive Party president Datuk M. Kayveas over his (Kayveas') views on Tamil schools.

Abdullah, who is also acting Finance Minister, was asked about the economic stimulus package necessitated by the war in Iraq.

He said the Government was monitoring the situation.

"We will determine the date but I think releasing the package this month is premature because of the (fluid) situation in Iraq."

To a question from a foreign journalist on the use of the Internal Security Act against some Parti Keadilan Nasional members, Abdullah said they were detained not because they were members of the party but due to activities deemed detrimental to the country.

On the possibility of the detainees being released, he replied there were procedures to be observed.