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## Umno to hold special gathering

Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will address all divisional, Youth, Wanita and Puteri leaders on latest issues within the country and outside during a special gathering scheduled to be held on Feb 13 at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today Dr Mahathir would also remind the leaders on preparations for the next general election.

"There are many issues which we have to brief our members regarding Government policies including the decision to stop funds for the Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) or Peoples' Religious Schools.

"The briefing is necessary so that these leaders can pass on the information to members at their divisions and the rakyat. It is a reminder to all quarters," said Abdullah after chairing the Umno management committee meeting at the party headquarters.

Asked if the briefing was an indication that the general election would be held soon, Abdullah replied: "This has nothing to do with the general election. It is just that there are many issues which we have to brief our members."

Abdullah, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, said after the briefing, a special tahlil (prayers) session would be held to remember the contributions of former Umno president and Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman.

Asked to comment on Dr Mahathir's statement on Tuesday that bickering within Umno could cause the party to lose out, Abdullah said: "In any party which practises democracy like us, we do have some bickering but it is not something that we cannot manage.

"We can handle it as long as we are aware that something has to be done to overcome the situation and to hinder it from developing into something which will tarnish the party.

"As far as I can remember being an Umno member since 1965, this sort of things happen as people have differences of ideas and opinions. But at the end of the day we must accept whatever is decided by the majority."

Dr Mahathir had said during an interview aired on CNBC that there was always "that potential" for bickering within the party when there was an opportunity to get into position of power.

To a question whether there was factions within the party, Abdullah said: "This is just the speculation of those who want to see problems in Umno."

Abdullah said the meeting also discussed applications to form 39 new branches and these would be submitted to the party's supreme council.