

Umno party polls postponed by 18 months
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Umno president Najib Razak tonight announced that the party polls next year will be postponed by 18 months in a bid to strengthen the party, confirming that general elections will be held either next year or 2012.

"The supreme council has unanimously decided this for the party elections at division and central leadership levels.

"This is provided for in the party constitution and is not the first time we have opted to do so," he said after the supreme council meeting at the party headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

Najib (right), who is also prime minister, said that the decision to postpone the polls was made to avoid the party from entering "a political struggle which could lead to clashes within the party" next year.

"We believe we can control this, but we don't want to be in a high pressure situation which had happened to other political parties," he said, perhaps referring to the problems afflicting the opposition PKR in its recent direct elections.

"We want the party to focus on the strengthening and improving of Umno based on a new political model."

Umno last held its triennial party election last year and the next polls are due in 2011.

When asked whether the postponement had anything to do with the forthcoming 13th general election, Najib who is also Umno president since winning the post, unopposed for the 2008-2011 period, said it was nothing new.

"To my knowledge, such a decision has made three or four times before and there was no problem or was it something unusual," he said.

The first time an Umno supreme council election was postponed came about in 1999, when it was delayed until May 2000 to concentrate on the 1999 general election. It was also put off in 2008 and the polls were held in March 2009 instead.

Counter to expectations

Najib's announcement, however, ran counter to expectations by pundits, who reckoned that the party could be finalising its leadership reshuffle tonight.

Commenting on this, he said that a reshuffle of state leadership is underway and that the announcement will be made by the end of the year.

"I need some time, along with the vice-presidents and secretary-general to meet and negotiate with certain leaders at state level to determine their job scope and what is expected of them," he said.

He added that the new line-up next year will also include re-appointed leaders.

Najib's announcement increases speculation over imminent snap polls next year, but when asked this, the premier kept his cards close to his chest.

"These are rumours. Some rumours are true and some rumours are untrue. It's up to you to decide," he said.

He also announced that 50,000 Umno members from Pemuda, Puteri and Wanita wings will attend a training session, based on the new political model outlined in the general assembly.

The model revolves around putting Umno as a champion of people's welfare, he said.

According to Bernama, Najib said the meeting tonight also took note of the current political developments in the country besides receiving reports on the BN successes in the by-elections in Galas and Batu Sapi recently.

"We have also taken stock that the public are of the opinion that the current vibrant and positive developments are a result of initiatives taken by the government and has let to added confidence of the people," he said.

Meanwhile, Najib added that the increase in the price of RON97 petrol which was not subsidised by the government, was due to an increase in the price of crude oil in the global market.

"The price of RON97 is determined by the market and not by the government and if there is a drop in the price globally, it will result in a drop in price of RON97 here," he said.

The price of RON97 petrol was reported to have increased by 15 sen and sold at RM2.30 per litre beginning Dec 1, but the price of RON95 petrol remains unchanged at RM1.85 per litre.