

Umno meeting to look at various issues
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Heated debates and lengthy discussions are expected at the Umno Supreme Council meeting later today at 3pm with party leaders trying to find solutions to many outstanding issues. MCPX

And it promises to be a long session with the meeting still on the way as at 6.40pm. Members of the council also expect a long night.

Among the top agenda for discussion is definitely the controversy surrounding the Terengganu menteri besar's post.

It is learnt that the party would now support the palace-backed Ahmad Said for the post following a meeting between Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and the king, who is also the Sultan of Terengganu.

Ahmad was given his appointment letter by the Terengganu palace on Sunday and he started work on Tuesday.

However he has not been sworn-in yet. Sources say the swearing-in of Ahmad and his exco members will take place over the "next few days". The 22 BN state representatives who had backed Idris Jusoh for the post are expected to leave Kuala Lumpur for Kuala Terengganu today.

They are now said to be willing to support Ahmad following the green light given by Abdullah.

Before his meeting with the king, Abdullah, also the Umno president, had insisted on the re-appointment of Idris to the post, calling the appointment of Ahmad as unconstitutional.

The Umno Supreme Council today is expected to rubberstamp Ahmad's appointment. No action is also expected to be taken against Ahmad for disobeying the party by taking up the post.

As a compromise, it is learnt that Chukai state representative Muhamad Awang Tera will be made the deputy menteri besar, a newly created post aimed at healing the rift between the party and the palace.

Other unconfirmed reports also indicate that the palace had stripped the datukship granted to Idris and state Umno secretary Rosol Wahid. Palace officials could not be contacted for confirmation. However Rosol denied this.

Calls to defer party polls

The supreme council is also expected to look at proposals from Umno divisional leaders on the need for party polls to be deferred to next year, a move widely seen to protect Abdullah from facing challenges to his posts.

While the move has gained some support from the divisional leaders, several party leaders have called for the party not to postpone the elections, expected to be held this August.

This matter could lead in a lengthy debate in the council meeting.

Several top leaders are also believed not to be in favour of any postponements. Last night's party management meeting has also unanimously agreed with the elections to be held this year.

The supreme council will also be looking into a call made by former party vice-president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah for an Extraordinary General Meeting to discuss the election results. Generally the party leaders have not been in favour of this proposal and it could be rejected today.

On a related matter, the party leaders are also expected to discuss a call made by the Cheras Umno division for the abolition of the quota system for nominations in order to contest the top posts.

The division wants the party to revert to its original principles whereby a candidate only required two nominations in order to contest the top two posts.

Presently a candidate needs nominations by at least 30 percent of the 193 Umno divisions in the country to contest for the post of president or 20 percent for the deputy president's post. This strict ruling has hampered many aspiring candidates to offer a successful challenge for the top posts.

Vacancies for deputy ministers

The supreme council may also be looking into the three empty deputy ministers' post available for the party in the government.

Two of the posts - deputy transport minister and deputy foreign minister - were rejected by Anifah Aman and Tengku Azlan Sultan Abu Bakar respectively, claiming that they were senior enough to be made full ministers.

Yesterday another Umno deputy minister, Ghapur Salleh quit his natural resources and environment deputy ministry post, saying that he wanted to "do my own thing"

Finally, the party leaders are also expected to discuss the post-mortem of the polls outcome which saw Umno and BN suffering terrible defeats.

The March 8 general election saw BN losing four states to the opposition as well as failing to retain Kelantan. In the federal level, BN also was denied its two-thirds majority.

Various quarters, from within BN and Umno, have asked Abdullah to take responsibility for the humiliating blow given by the voters.

Abdullah himself admitted that he was slow in implementing his projects and assured Malaysians that he would fulfill their demands.

Meanwhile, just as the supreme council meeting was underway, Tengku Razaleigh was also testing his own strength by meeting with more than 100 party members.

The meeting took place at his residence in Kuala Lumpur and among the division leaders who attended the meeting included former Information Minister Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir (from the Kulim/Bandar Baharu division), Ibrahim Saad (Batu Kawan) and Malek Hanafiah (Taiping).

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