

Umno polls in December, Ahmad backed as MB
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Beh Lih Yi

After a four-hour marathon supreme council meeting, Umno today decided it will not defer its party polls and to declare its support for Kijal state representative Ahmad Said as the new Terengganu menteri besar. MCPX

Party president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Umno has decided to give its backing to the palace-backed Ahmad over the party's choice of incumbent Idris Jusoh, because the impasse has to be resolved immediately.

abdullah supreme council 02" Apart from the fact that it was crucial to form the state government, (the decision) is also based on the public statement made by Idris that he will support any decision by the Regency Advisory Council," he told reporters after the meeting held at the party headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

"With that, the supreme council decides to resolve this matter as we have to form the state government. BN has to give its support to Ahmad which is backed by the Regency Advisory Council and we will give our full support to him," he added.

Abdullah, who is also the prime minister, thanked Idris for his one-term service as the MB.

Idris was present at the council meeting in his capacity as the Terengganu party chief.

He did not comment when approached by reporters. He went straight to meet a group of the state assemblypersons from the state who have pledged their supports for him at another room at the Umno building.

'Not for the press to know'

Asked on Idris' response during the meeting, Abdullah reiterated that Idris has openly said he will accept any decision on the matter. The president added that he believed the 22 BN state assemblypersons will work with the new MB.

sultan mizan king pak lah ahmad said idris jusoh and terengganu Abdullah, who has earlier declared Ahmad's appointment as unconstitutional, said the legality aspect of the issue was not discussed and that it did not wish to pursue on that.

To another question on whether the party's decision today may be seen as 'losing face' for BN, Abdullah countered, "Not necessarily", and reiterated that the palace has made the decision.

Pressed on why BN compromised in the matter, Abdullah told off the journalists: "All the details that have been discussed is not for the press to know. What you should know is the decision has been made, that is for the interest of the Terengganu people, we can't go on disputing it."

The decision today to accept Ahmad as the new MB is believed to be a result of a meeting between Abdullah and the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin, who is also

the Sultan of Terengganu, yesterday.

With the decision today, the Umno supreme council is also expected not to take any further action against Ahmad, which the party has threatened to do so earlier should Ahmad take up the MB post.

According to a source, none of the council members objected to the appointment of Ahmad, who took office on Tuesday.

Nominations quota to remain

Meanwhile, Abdullah also revealed that the Umno polls would be held during this year's annual general assembly which begins on Dec 16 to 20 this year, killing off all earlier speculations that it could be deferred.

Branch-level elections will be held between July 17 to Aug 24, while divisional level is slated for Oct 9 to Nov 9.

Abdullah also said he was ready to face any challenger for his party presidency.

"If they have the support and they want to challenge, I have to face it, I am not going to run away," said the president, adding that there will not be any amendment on the party's election procedures.

This means that, among others, the requirement of getting nominations from at least 30 percent of the 191 divisions in order for a candidate to challenge for the president's post will stay.

So far, Umno veteran and Gua Musang division chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah has offered himself to contest the top post. In the 2004 party poll, Razaleigh also took on Abdullah but only managed to secure one nomination from his Gua Musang division.

Asked on Razaleigh's proposal to call for an extraordinary general meeting to discuss Umno's electoral disaster, Abdullah replied: "It was not our proposal".

Resignation due to 'private reason'

On the resignation of Deputy Natural Resources and Environment Minister Ghapur Salleh yesterday, Abdullah denied it was signalling the loss of confidence in his administration.

abdul ghapur salleh and abdullah ahmad badawi"He has given the reasons, it has nothing to do with that. It was very private reason, I have read the letter, he left the letter, he wanted to see me but I couldn't because I was involved in so many things," said the premier.

Ghapur, a former Sabah deputy chief minister, is the second Sabah MP and Sabah Umno leader to turn down a federal deputy minister position following the March 8 general election. Komanis MP Anifah Aman declined to take up the deputy transport minister's post on the day he was appointed.

Similarly, another Umno leader from Pahang, Tengku Azlan Sultan Abu Bakar, also declined the deputy foreign minister's post. Both of them said that they were senior enough to be

made full ministers.

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