

Umno defers party polls

The Star - 20/9/2006

Former division secretary sacked for slamming leadership in blog

KUALA LUMPUR: The Umno election scheduled for next year has been deferred until after the next general election, which is due in 2009.

Announcing this, party president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the decision was based on "party policy", adding that Umno had done this in two previous party elections.

"It has proven to be beneficial to the party, as it allows us to give full attention and focus on the country's development and projects," he told reporters after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting here yesterday.

The last Umno election was in 2004.

Its constitution provides for the party to postpone its triennial election for up to 18 months.

The meeting also decided to sack former Bandar Tun Razak Umno division secretary Zaharin Yassin for running down the party leadership in his blog.

Abdullah said the supreme council had received a report on Zaharin from the party's disciplinary board, through the management committee.

This is the second time that Umno had sacked him for breaching party discipline.

He was kicked out in 1996 by then deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who headed the disciplinary board for criticising him (Anwar).

Zaharin rejoined Umno in 1998 after Anwar was expelled.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Radzi Sheikh Ahmad said the sacking had nothing to do with the Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad issue.

"He came out with comments in his *Sang Kelembai* blog which ran down the party and the leadership, including the president, on countless occasions."

Radzi said the disciplinary board had initially recommended that Zaharin be suspended until the next party election and be issued a stern warning. He said

the board had also recommended that if Zaharin continued with his attacks in his blog, he should be sacked.

When the case was brought before the supreme council yesterday, Radzi said the decision was made to enhance the punishment and expel him.

Asked if this was a warning to other bloggers who are Umno members, he said: "Possibly".

"It sends a clear message," he said, adding that Zaharin could appeal after three years to rejoin the party.

When contacted, Zaharin thanked the council for sacking him because this would give him the freedom to say whatever he liked.

"I did not run down Umno or its policies. I only criticised the leadership," he said, adding that he would continue to support the party.

He said he would apply to re-join Umno "when there is a change of leader" in the party.