

Does Abdullah have snap election in mind?

the Sun says:
Umno must
reform its
political culture

Analysis by **Husna Yusop** and
R. Manirajan
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

THE postponement of the Umno party election until after the next general election has invited suggestions that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is not riding out the full five years of his first term as the prime minister.

He made the announcement after chairing last Thursday's Umno Supreme Council meeting.

The party election is scheduled for next year, and Abdullah's term of office runs out in March 2009. He is only now in mid-term, but what a ride it has been.

Observers have begun speculating that Abdullah will call a snap national election next year - any time after next March when the current state assemblymen and MPs would have completed at least three years of their term.

According to the party

constitution, a special motion will have to be tabled at next month's general assembly to postpone the party election in a maximum 18 months.

Umno insiders say there is now too-much politicking, jostling and lobbying, fuelled by mounting pressures from former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his supporters who have become strong critics of Abdullah's administration.

Umno information chief Tan Sri Muhammad Muhd Taib said Abdullah's announcement has nothing to do with snap elections.

"It is to divert the attention of members from the party election. Since next year is (party) election year, it is a crucial time for Umno members. But we have just started the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP). So, we need to postpone the party election," he said.

"Pak Lah has to make the announcement now, otherwise in

the next one year, it is feared Umno members will concentrate on the party election and start fighting for posts or positions.

"The president wants them to concentrate on their work, on ensuring the success of the 9MP and to live up to the big mandate given by the people in the last general election?"

Umno Youth deputy chief Khaifry Jamaluddin had early this year made the same suggestion to postpone the party election for fear of a break in unity before the next general election.

According to party insiders, the factors pressuring the premier to call for early elections are:

- « the global economic outlook which is expected to be very volatile towards the end of next year because of rising world crude oil prices;

- and
- « internal party problems which necessitate Abdullah securing another big electoral victory to consolidate his position.

DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng said Abdullah cannot wait until after April 15, 2008, when former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim can launch a comeback to the political scene by contesting in the general election.

"But that is not important. The more important factor is the internal dynamics within Umno ... the party cannot go on with one ship having two captains."

Lim said Abdullah would be able to consolidate and re-affirm his position as the Umno "supreme

commander" and then really get on with his agenda after securing a new mandate through a general election.

PAS deputy president Nasharudin Mat Isa said PAS had predicted at its *muktamar* (assembly) in June the next general election would be held between June and December next year.

"Abdullah's announcement supports our prediction. He needs a new mandate as the problems he is facing now have nearly reached the peak," he said.

He said Abdullah is challenged internally and externally - from the domestic economic problems and the Singapore issue to the bickering within Barisan Nasional component parties and crisis within Umno.

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Keadilan information chief Tian Chua believes Abdullah needs to re-assert his control by winning in the next general election.

"This shows he has no grip within the party and needs to strengthen his support from the general public. Otherwise, he would go for a party election first where he can select people from his own team to lead the party and then go for the general election," he said.