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Dr M: It's normal to delay polls

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UMNO ELECTIONS:

I did the same when I was president, says veteran statesman

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THE postponement of Umno elections is normal as this has been done before, said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The former Umno president said when he was party president, he had deferred the party polls, too.

"In the past, I have deferred the polls. I did it out of fear of internal turmoil, problems and splits in the party," he said after visiting Kompleks Pekan Rabu here yesterday.

"I don't think there are problems (in the party) as the elections will be held using a new system."

Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak said on Friday party elections would be put on hold for 18 months to give the party leadership more

time to carry out policies for the people.

Under Article 10.16 of Umno's constitution, its supreme council may postpone the party's elections for a period not exceeding 18 months.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor said the decision to postpone the party elections was made due to requests by division leaders.

Tengku Adnan said he was made aware of the grassroots leaders' suggestions during a workshop in Janda Baik, Pahang, recently.

"The idea to postpone the polls was not from the supreme council, but from the grassroots, who said the party should focus on improving its strategies in its bid to win the 14th General Election.

"Leaders from 14 divisions, out of 191, were absent from the workshop. Those present expressed their views and said due to the current political scenario, it is better to postpone the party polls for 18 months," he said during an event at AEON AU2 Shopping Centre yesterday.

He denied the decision was made due to the ongoing issues, such as the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB).

"It has nothing to do with 1MDB or any other problem. The leaders told

me that if we carry on with the polls next year, it may cause other problems. The time that we have will be used to hold programmes to strengthen the party and look for ways to win the next general election," said Tengku, who is federal territories minister and Putrajaya member of parliament.

On Datuk Seri G. Palanivel's position in MIC, Tengku Adnan said the former should respect the letter by the Registrar of Societies (RoS).

"RoS was stating the party's constitution. If a president could not follow the party's constitution, who else would? MIC's constitution states that you cannot bring the party to court or face losing your position. The supreme council has discussed the issue and we will listen to RoS and abide by the law."

Palanivel was reported to have lost his position as MIC president, according to a letter by RoS.

Article 41 of MIC's constitution states that every member is bound by the decision of the central working committee and that he may lose his membership should he resort to court action in regards to his rights, obligations, duties and privileges.

Johor Umno liaison committee chief Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin said the postponement

would allow the party to gain victory in the next general election.

"Every time there is a party election, there will be problems that lead to factionalism in the party, and this is not good if we want to face the next general election.

"Johor Umno accepts this decision and feels that there is no problem for the divisions to accept it," he said after handing contributions during a Ziarah Ramadan programme at Kampung Melayu Pandan Mosque yesterday.

The party leadership should consider holding party elections after every general election to avoid postponements, according to Cheras Umno chief Syed Ali Alhabshee.

Syed Ali, who is also Umno Federal Territories secretary, said the party leadership should consider amending Umno's constitution to allow party elections to be held once every general election.

"Three weeks ago, I had a meeting with (Cheras) division colleagues and we thought it would be better for the party elections to be held, as scheduled, next year.

"This can allow the party leadership to earn a fresh mandate from members.

"However, since the supreme council has decided otherwise, we

will abide by the decision," he told the *New Sunday Times* yesterday.

"If party elections are held after every general election, then there will not be a need for such postponements. Previous leaderships have done the same thing and it has become a regular occurrence."

Former Umno Labis vice-chief and veteran member Hashim Daud said the party leadership should use the next 18 months to its full advantage.

"Use this time to strengthen the party and gain the support of the people. If Dr Mahathir and Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi could do it, why can't Najib?"

Umno Selangor secretary and Semenyih assemblyman Datuk Johan Abdul Aziz said the postponement would allow the party's grassroots leaders to focus on issues affecting the people.

"For example, the residents in my constituency have been facing water disruptions for nine days. I distributed clean water to 1,000 households this afternoon (yesterday).

"If there is an election looming, grass-roots leaders could be distracted from serving the people efficiently. We certainly welcome the postponement." **Additional reporting by Adrian Lai and Ahmad Fairuz Othman**