Keep money politics out, says Abdullah

The star - 24/4/2004, m/s: 2

BY SHAHANAAZ HABIB

KUALA LUMPUR: Umno contenders for the coming party elections including those vying for the three vice-president posts should steer clear of money politics or face stern action, warned Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The acting Umno president said the Government had taken steps to combat graft, adding that money politics during party elections was a form of corruption.

"I hope there will be a new mood and this (money politics) will not be a problem in the coming party elections," he said yesterday after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting at PWTC.

"The same rule applies to everybody. We are very fair."

Abdullah, who is Prime Minister, said disciplinary action would be taken against anyone involved in money politics and the action would be proportionate to the severity of the act.

Umno branch elections would be held from June 1 to June 30 while the divisions would hold theirs from July 8 to 22.

The council has not fixed the dates for the main party elections due to "technical problems" which are expected to be sorted out within a week.

Main party elections would have to be held by December. Abdullah and Najib are expected to win the Umno president and deputy president posts uncontested.

At the council meeting yesterday, Abdullah said it was important that all party leaders ensured that actions during the party election campaign would not cause any problems within Umno.

"We must safeguard the party to make sure it remains strong and solid during the elections," he said.

HAPPY NOTE: Abdullah and Najib in a cheerful mood as they answer questions from the press in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He also showed a book printed by the party on election guidelines for the branch and division posts so that members would be aware.

A counter would be open at the Umno headquarters so that members could come and check their names in the list for the branch elections. There would also be a public complaints counter.

"We want Umno to be more *mesra rakyat* (people-friendly) and be concerned about the people," Abdullah said.

He also announced the appointment of Datuk Idris Jusoh as the new Terengganu Umno state liaison chief and Tengku Putra Tengku Awang as the deputy.

"Before the general election, I had expressed the interest that an *anak* Terengganu should hold the post. And Barisan Nasional won Terengganu and it won big so I feel Idris Jusoh is suitable to be the new chief," he said. Before this, Abdullah was holding the post.

Najib, who heads the Umno management committee, announced that the suspension of Datuk Azim Zabidi, Datuk Yusof Jamli and Datuk Yahya Lampong from the party had been lifted. This means the three are free to contest for branch, division or the main party posts.

Najib also said the Tapah Umno division chief Datuk Azman Mahalan who had been charged for corruption had agreed to withdraw from the party post.

"This is consistent with the party policy that when someone is facing a charge in court, he should step down," he said.

As for the Dengkil chief Datuk Mohd Sharif Jajang, who was facing a similar charge, no decision has been made on him because he had not volunteered to step down from his party post as yet.