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Umno-Changes (news analysis)

GENERAL ASSEMBLY REFLECTS DESIRE FOR CHANGE

By: Ali Mamat

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 12 (Bernama) -- The four-day Umno General Assembly ended here today after witnessing several developments which could change the cause of the struggle and direction of the party towards a more glorious era.

Political analysts general feel that the assembly, which holds elections once in three years for various party posts in Umno Youth, Wanita and Supreme Council, was a reflection of the delegates' seriousness to revive Umno's original culture particularly with regards to party polls.

However, this did not mean that Umno and its members were taking a step backward.

Instead, the process to reform the Malays towards the new culture which hinged on courtesy, discipline, hardwork, honesty, sincerity and fairness would be enhanced.

"The seriousness showed the readiness of the majority of Umno members to sacrifice, devote themselves to the party and prepared to set aside their personal interests to boost the dignity of the race, country and religion," said an Umno Youth leader.

He said it also showed the members' zeal to cleanse the party from those involved in corruption, money politics and abuse of power.

This is in line with the aspirations of the party's top two leaders -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

In fact, the delegates had manifested their desire to a certain extent through the election results.

In Umno Youth, Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi was elected as the new chief, a move which showed the emergence of a young, moderate and a person with big potential and Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, another rising star, for the movement's vice-head post.

In Wanita Umno, delegates opted for Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman as their new chief but retained Datuk Napsiah Omar for the Number Two spot.

Analysts believed the election of Zahid, Hishammuddin, Dr Siti Zaharah and Napsiah as well as several new faces and old guards in the executive council of the two movements to a certain extent echoed the call by Anwar who opened the Umno Youth and Wanita assemblies simultaneously.

Anwar had urged Umno members to adopt the "muhasabah" process whereby leaders are elected for their commendable qualities.

The seven-corner contest for the three vice-president's posts saw Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, who was defeated in 1993, being re-elected and incumbent Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin eliminated. Two incumbents -- Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhamad Taib -- retained.

In the 1993 party polls, Muhyiddin emerged tops with 1,413 votes but this time around he could only garner 545 votes.

Election to the supreme council, the party's highest policy-making body, also saw the defeat of several old guards including Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik and corporate figure Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor as well as the rejection of several deputy ministers, parliamentary secretaries and corporate leaders.

Analysts believed the results could be part of the immediate impact of Dr Mahathir's policy speech when opening the assembly.

The assembly also created political history by eliminating many incumbents holding government posts from the supreme council this time.

They include International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Muhyiddin, Sabbaruddin, Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa, Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, Perak Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib and Negeri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamed Isa Abdul Samad.

Others are Deputy Agriculture Minister Datuk Dr Tengku Mahmud Mansor, Deputy Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Abu Bakar Daud, Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Dr Abdullah Fadzil Che Wan, Deputy Works Minister Datuk Railey Jeffrey, Land and Cooperative Development Ministry parliamentary secretary Datuk Fauzi Abdul Rahman and Mara chairman Datuk Othman Abdul.

Annuar and Isa lost in their bid for the Umno Youth chief's post while Syed Hamid and Ramli were unsuccessful in the vice-presidency race while the others were not chosen for the 25 elected supreme council seats.

An almost similar scenario prevailed in the 1987 party election but the losers then chosed to leave the Cabinet and formed Parti Melayu Semangat 46 led by former Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Certainly, this year's assembly had succeeded to some extent in realising the wishes of the party leadership to make Umno a truly clean party.

Nevertheless, looking from another aspect, the decision creates a new burden to Dr Mahathir which required his wisdom to fulfil the members' wishes.

Undoubtedly, they hoped to see that the changes in the leadership line-up would be reflected in the government posts at federal and state levels.

However, everyone is confident that Dr Mahathir will once again demonstrate his wisdom in handling whatever situation to the satisfaction of one and all. -- BERNAMA

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