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Mahathir-Money Politics (News Analysis)  
THE IMPACT OF MONEY POLITICS ON UMNO

By: Azman Ujang

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has often spoken on the danger of money politics in Umno but for the first time today he spoke at length on the impact of money politics on the party and the nation.

His views on money politics when opening the Umno general assembly here was loud and clear, and as stated by former Umno veteran Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, could only be expressed by Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir's hard-hitting speech which should prick the conscience of those involved, was regarded by observers as possibly the best ever delivered during his 15 years as Umno president.

According to Dr Mahathir, if money is needed in campaigns candidates in party elections would need to resort to illegal practices or by issuing licences, AP's, shares and awarding tenders or contracts, to their supporters.

In other words, money politics are resorted to by those who have no qualms in misusing power and opportunity in furthering themselves.

Dr Mahathir had said that as prime minister or minister or office bearers with specific portfolios in the federal or state governments, the income is sufficient only to live a moderate life.

According to him, the cost of electing the supreme council has escalated. "It first began when a state placed their delegates to the general assembly in a well-known hotel. Then other states followed suit.

"Later, the hotel status had to be upgraded to five stars. It must be nothing less if support is to be given," he said.

This has been proven as all five star hotels in the city have been fully booked this week and most of the guests are said to be Umno members.

Dr Mahathir asked: "But where did such enormous amounts of money come from? It could perhaps be party donations. But can the party's money be utilised to popularise specific individuals?"

Candidates also began offering bribes and gifts to delegates. There were competition between candidates and the amount of bribes increased.

In fact, the process of bribery begins much earlier. A year or more before elections, bribery begins.

It is not the performance or the person's ability that is the basis for selection. What determines support is the value of the bribe that one is willing to give.

Not only are travelling expenses to Kuala Lumpur and the five-star hotels borne by the candidates, overseas trips are also arranged or promised, said the Prime Minister.

Initially, it was just across the borders but today trips to Europe and America must be sponsored to ensure delegates' loyalty.

Because delegates to the general assembly get many benefits, contest to be delegates become intense.

Government servants will also not be exempted. This is because government servants, aware of these abuses, will threaten that they too should be bribed.

Dr Mahathir said that all government dealings will cease to function smoothly and all costs will escalate. Nothing will be exemptd from bribery.

Licences, AP's and approvals require bribes. Dealings with the private sector, such as banks, require specific payments to those who are in position to approve.

The Prime Minister said that bribery knows no limit and over a period of time there will be more demands by more people. Finally, investors will move out, job opportunities will not increase but will be reduced, poverty will be rampant and the economy will not grow. All work will be delayed and will slow down.

Ghazali, who held various important government and political posts including Home Minister and Foreign Minister, said in response to Dr Mahathir's speech that he had long ago harboured the fear that Malaysia would be faced with money politics as a result of the nations's economic success.

"Dr Mahathir has put it very nicely and only he could have said what needs to be said," Ghazali said after the opening of the general assembly.

A supporter of a candidate in the party election said that he had been instructed by the candidate to distribute a total of RM1.3 million to garner support on the eve of the election but all plans were cancelled following the move by the special committee to drop six candidates said to have contravened the ban on campaigns, abusing their power or being involved in money politics.

"Just imagine the amount of money distributed by candidates who are richer, especially those contesting for higher posts," he said.

Dr Mahathir felt so strongly about money politics that at the end of his speech, he said that he was sad because he was forced to expose dirty linen in public.

He had then visibly fought to regain his composure and went on to finish his speech.

He said: "But I believe that calamity will befall us if we do not reject those who bribed us."

To Dr Mahathir, there is no difference between corrupt Umno leaders and those who take drugs.

"When addicted, the dignity of our race and nation will be sold to anyone," he said. -- BERNAMA

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