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Umno-registration (News Analysis)

UMNO ELECTION REGISTRATION TO WIPE OUT UNHEALTHY PRACTICE

By: Abdul Rahman Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, April 13 (Bernama) -- Umno's latest move in making it compulsory for those wishing to contest the party Supreme Council and other party posts this October to register with the party headquarters has been decried by political observers here as a right move to stamp out unhealthy practices in campaigning for the party elections.

Money politics, grouping of supporters and insincere candidates, using the membership for self-interest, are some of the bad party practices which the party would now try to eliminate, once and for all.

Umno sources said the registration was a way of preventing the appearance of "last minute" surprise candidates, and to avoid their clamour for positions at the eleventh hour, especially in the contest for the higher posts, as occurred in the 1993 elections.

Under the registration system, announced by Umno President and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad after the party Supreme Council meeting last Saturday (April 6), aspirants for all party posts would have to register within a month from last Monday (April 8). They would then only be allowed to commence campaigning on July 1 till the election day.

According to the guidelines for this procedure, Umno headquarters with the cooperation of the respective state liaison committees would make the arrangements to introduce potential candidates at meetings, intended for campaigning.

The state Umno would now be prevented from holding special meetings for specific candidates, since they are required to be fair to all the candidates.

A political observer who requested anonymity said one "bad" practice by the party was allowing the groupings among candidates themselves.

"In past elections, several candidates had surfaced in the midst of the campaign frenzy, claiming they had the sponsorship of specific leaders. As clearly seen in the 1993 elections, only candidates who allied themselves with such leaders were invited to specific functions held by the leaders concerned," he said.

The same observer felt that the registration of candidates would also forestall any possible surprises of candidates suddenly clamouring for the top positions of the party, like the president and the deputy president posts.

"Although the last party assembly adopted a resolution, ruling out contests for the party president and the deputy president posts, anything can happen in politics," he said, adding that such a resolution was not provided for under the party constitution.

Questioned on this possibility, Umno Secretary General Datuk Mohamed Rahmat replied: "We will have to wait and see - who will contest, and for what posts."

The sources agreed that the candidate registration approach would definitely reduce the money politics practice, which Umno had now vowed to stamp out because it considered it unhealthy. The candidates would no longer be in the position to hold campaigns during which they would offer money as gratification.

"The practice of money politics does not only make it easy for the candidates fishing for votes, but it also works the other way for the supporters, taking the bait, to hope for the eventual bigger rewards in return," he said.

The phenomena, he explained, could not be overcome entirely, since money can be offered anywhere, and in the veil of complete secrecy, at holiday resorts, the house, the hotels and even overseas, he said.

Advising the candidates to be cautious when approaching anyone they plan to win over, the source said: "Do not easily be taken by those who are prepared to accept money...this could be a trap."

Candidates, he said, must be cautious and take a serious look at this "most intense" contest for they could end up as sore losers with their nominations cancelled, if caught in the act.

Another observer said the frenzied campaigning could be manipulated by candidates, out purely for personal gains, if there was no requirement for registration. Elaborating on this, he said there could be a situation where a candidate, having tested the ground, would back out from the race after relishing himself to the vast sums of money offered by contenders.

"There will also be other aspirants to make the early start in campaigning, by visiting various places to garner support. Such people will be sweet-talking the various party divisions, and will later announce his willingness to contest, claiming he has the nomination," he said.

"Now, there is a change in the situation. A potential candidate need not have to garner support, as all he has to do is to register his intention for the contest," he said

The party divisions would just have to make the endorsement for his candidacy.

As aptly described by former Umno Secretary-General Tan Sri Mustapha Jabar, a member only had to register his name and with the registration no state liaison body could oppose his candidacy.

The rest would be up to the party in general to decide at the assembly, he said. -- Bernama

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