

10 OCT 1996

Umno-Struggle (News Analysis)

UMNO HEADING BACK TO ITS ORIGINAL STRUGGLE

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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 10 (Bernama) -- The winds of change which swept through the Umno Youth and Wanita Movements yesterday changed course today and blew across the party's supreme policy making body.

The results of the election to the Umno Supreme Council saw some marked changes which observers said reflected the members' determination to return the party to its original tracks as exhorted by party President Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The party had earlier resolved that there would be no contests for the posts of Umno President and Deputy President.

One clear change was the election of Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as one of the three Vice-Presidents of the party with the second highest number of votes. He polled 1,053 votes and thus returned to the position he held for three terms until 1993 when he did not make it.

In yesterday's Umno Youth and Wanita Umno elections, incumbents Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Chik and Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz were ousted as Umno Youth Chief and Wanita Umno head respectively.

Rahim was beaten by the movement's information chief Datuk Zahid Hamidi and Rafidah by the Wanita movement's executive committee member Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman.

Two incumbent vice-presidents who were returned are Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak who received the highest number of 1,483 votes and Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhammad Taib who obtained 1,045 votes. The incumbent vice president who was defeated is Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin who was elected a VP in 1993 when he was Johor Menteri Bear.

Observers following developments at the Umno General Assembly are convinced that the election of Abdullah as vice-president is linked to the points stressed by Dr Mahathir when opening the assembly this morning.

Dr Mahathir had stressed the vital importance of electing party officials at all levels based on performance and merit of the candidate concerned as was the practice in the early years of the formation of Umno.

Abdullah is seen by observers as one of the pioneer torch bearers of the party's struggle and who had continued to give his service even when sidelined by the party.

"Pak Lah's (Abdullah) victory without a hectic campaign manifested the rising feeling of contempt the delegates now had for all forms of corruption and abuse of power," said a Negeri Sembilan delegate who said he voted for the Foreign Minister.

The election of Abdullah is also seen as the drifting away of the "Wawasan Team" which was formed before the last Umno General Assembly as the candidates contesting this time around were on their own.

Abdullah and another incumbent vice-president who was defeated in 1993, present Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, were said to have not belonged to any team and depended more on their own performance and strength.

Observers feel that the decision of the delegates to retain Najib showed that they were impressed by the Education Minister's performance and were confident that he would live up to the trust placed in him and ensure the success of the country's education system to realise Vision 2020.

Muhammad was retained as a Vice President for besides making a name for himself as the most active Menteri Besar in bringing development to his

state of Selangor which could be described as the most developed state in Malaysia, he is also seen as an appropriate candidate to represent the "Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers Club" in charting Umno's course.

Observers also feel that the delegates had now apportioned the posts more equitably unlike in 1993 when they elected two Menteris Besar as vice-presidents -- Muhyiddin and Muhammad.

Perhaps in a move not to repeat that, the delegates this time did not vote in Perak Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib who after all is not a pushover.

Observers also feel that Ramli was not elected as a vice-president to give more opportunity and time to him to concentrate on developing Perak which is rich in natural resources but lagged behind Selangor and Johor.

Observers also feel that the delegates turned down another candidate for the vice president's post Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar because of the difficulty in choosing between two candidates from the same state of Johor. The other Johor candidate is Muhyiddin.

"Apart from the votes of the Johor delegates being split, delegates from other states also faced difficulties in making a choice and in the end Syed Hamid was not able to reach what he was pursuing and what Muhyiddin was carrying in the folds of his sarung also dropped along the way."

Observers also attributed Muhyiddin's inability to retain his post to the loss of influence after being transferred to Kuala Lumpur as Minister of Youth and Sports from Johor where he was the state's Chief Executive.

The presence this time around of another candidate for vice president, Yob Tajuddin Kulub Ismail was not a factor in the outcome of the election, observers said.

The delegates' acceptance of Dr Mahathir's tearful advice was reflected in the election to the 25-member Supreme Council. Of the 55 candidates who contested, the delegates had been clearly very selective with a view to ensuring a balance between old and new faces and that they met the aspirations of the entire Umno membership and the top leadership.

Hence they retained the 17 old faces and put in eight new ones.

The eight are Datuk Salleh Tun Said Keruak, Datuk Mohd Shafie Apdal, Datuk Hassan Ariffin, Datuk Dr Affifuddin Omar, Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, Datuk Suleiman Mohamed, Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam and Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

Old faces shown the exit were Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik and former Perlis Menteri Besar Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Pawanteh. Syed Hamid and Ramli who contested for the post of Vice-President did not defend their seats in the Supreme Council just like Negeri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Isa Samad who lost in his second bid to become Umno Youth Chief.

Five ministers including Syed Hamid and Sabbaruddin are not in the party's top policy making body.

The other three are Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz who failed to retain her post as Wanita Umno Chief, Muhyiddin and Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa who contested the Umno Chief Post and did not defend his post in the Supreme Council.

Observers and delegates met after the results were announced felt the outcome also reflected Umno's wish to strengthen its presence in Sabah.

Salleh, Mohd Shafie and Minister of Land and Cooperative Development Datuk Osu Sukam were elected to the council. Osu is from Sabah.

Following the results of the Umno election, observers said Dr Mahathir will probably review the position of several ministers who are no longer in the Supreme Council and bring in new faces. -- BERNAMA

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