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Umno-Hulu Selangor ((News Focus)

FORMER SELANGOR MB'S DIVISION TO ELECT NEW LEADER ON FRIDAY

By: Abdul Rahman Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 (Bernama) -- For 16 years Umno members in the Hulu Selangor Division left everything in the goods hands of then Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhammad Taib but come Friday they will have to replace the once powerful strongman.

Muhammad, who remains Umno Vice-President, will not seek re-election as Hulu Selangor Umno Division head following the Umno Supreme Council's ruling that members who are facing criminal cases in court cannot contest any party post.

Muhammad, who also remains the assemblyman for Batang Kali, faces a charge of failing to declare cash to the value then of RM2.4 million that he was carrying at Brisbane International Airport on Dec 22, 1996 as he was about to leave Australia and also another charge of making a false statement before entering Australia on Dec 16, 1996 also pertaining to money. Both the cases are pending hearing.

Muhammad, who is charged under the Foreign Financial Transaction Report Act 1988 can be fined and jailed on conviction.

Meanwhile two men are vying to replace him as Hulu Selangor Umno Division head -- former Selangor Umno Youth head Datuk Idris Abu Bakar and former Hulu Selangour Division Umno Youth Treasurer Mohamed Nazar Mohamed Yakin.

Incumbent deputy head of the division and Ulu Bernam Assemblyman Datuk Zainal Sakom is being challenged by Norazman Adnan while the post of vice-head of the division is a contest between Felda scheme settler Haji Said Latif and one Jamaluddin Yusof. Incumber vice-head Anwar Ayob is not seeking re-election.

The divisional election has taken on a new dimension with the claim that the contest for the various post there are between factions -- the one aligned to current Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar and the other to Muhammad.

The faction aligned to Muhammad is said to be eager to continue the tradition and struggle of the former Menteri Besar while the other one is reported to be wanting to break with the past as personified by Muhammad whose leadership it accuses of bringing about development which is not comprehensive to members and the people.

However Zainal denies that his group is a proxy of Muhammad and says his group represents second echelon leaders very much needed by Umno members in the division.

"We are contesting in view of the many nominations we have received from tthe branches," he told Bernama.

The Hulu Selangor Umno Division has 74 branches and 350 delegates will attend Friday's divisional conference.

Zainal, who is also chairman of the Selangor Poverty Eradication Foundation, said his group had received more than 60 nominations and this proved that Umno members wanted to continue the tradition of the division's past leadership.

Meanwhile Mohamed Nazar said his group had received five nominations from the Setiajaya, Kampung Suharto, Batu 30, Sungai Choh Station and Nigel Gardener branches.

Mohamed Nazar who contested and lost the Hulu Selangor parliamentary seat on a Parti Melayu Semangat 46 ticket in the general election of 1995 said even though his group had received only a small number of nominations

this was not a yardstick to measure the wishes of the members and delegates to the conference.

"These nominations need not necessarily reflect the feelings of the delegates. We understand that many Umno members want a change in the leadership which no longer remained in the shadow of Tan Sri Muhammad," he said.

Mohamed Nazar said he was contesting at the behest of many members who felt the development brought about by Muhammad had actually resulted "in damage to the environment."

"Uncontrolled and disorganised development has harmed the environment. Previously Hulu Selangor had many sources of water but now many are polluted and now we often hear that many places have no water," he said.

"We are championing the interests of the Hulu Selangor people," he added.

He also claimed that the Umno Division's decision to hold the divisional conference on a Friday was aimed at preventing delegates supportive of his group from attending.

He said 40 per cent of the total number of delegates were teachers and civil servants who would have to attend to their duties while the conference was in progress.

Zainal denies the charge.

He said the conference was to have been held on Saturday but on that day Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would open the Kuala Selangor divisional conference and it was proposed that it be held on Sunday but Muhammad said he would not be free so it was decided on Friday.

-- BERNAMA

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