

01 APR 1998

Umno-Division (News Analysis)

MONEY POLITICS STILL SURFACE IN PRESENT ECONOMIC SITUATION

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, April 1 (Bernama) -- Politicians don't seem to know the meaning of economic turmoil. Otherwise it was unlikely for complaints over money politics being raised during the recently concluded Umno division meetings.

In effect, the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) had questioned several Selagor and Kedah Umno members over such claims.

This prompted Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to state that Umno was prepared to dismiss those involved, regardless of their position. "We fear that the people will despise and loathe Umno if there had been corrupt practices in the party election," he said opening the delegates meeting of Kubang Pasu Umno of which he is the leader.

In tackling the problem, several proposals had been made, specifying the importance of the party tightening the conditions for candidates seeking divisional positions.

This include imposing the minimum nomination percentage for candidates and also their membership duration before being allowed to contest the party posts at divisional level.

At present, a candidate only has to come up with two nominations from the branches for the contests.

The situation had brought the assumption that those with the financial means can contest any key positions although they have just joined the party.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said most of the complaints brought before the party's management and disciplinary committee were caused by the contests. This includes allegations of money politics during campaigning.

As a result of these reports, actions were taken against those involved, including suspension of party membership, stripping their rights to contest and also a stern warning against those making false reports.

"We also don't want people making false reports, or making such reports only to annoy others...this will aggravate the situation," he said.

With all the 165 Umno divisions having concluded their delegates meetings, the party will focus attention on its coming general assembly scheduled to be held from July 19 to 21.

Many have been successful in defending their seats, and many divisions have new leaders like the Pokok Sena and Merbok, both in Kedah, and Muar and Mersing in Johor.

Besides there are also "personalities" making a come back as party delegates to the general assembly as former Social Welfare Minister Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad as a case in point.

Shahrir has returned to head the Johor Baharu Umno Division after he was given passage by Johore Baharu MP Khaled Nordin. Khaled step aside to take the deputy leader post, after conceding to Shahrir to resume the leadership post he once held.

Another stalwart whom made a comeback was Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah now heads the Gua Musang Umno Division.

This followed the party's supreme council decision for the post be given to the former Semangat Melayu 46 president, edging the incumbent divisional chief Saupi Deraman to second place.

The divisional elections also saw the withdrawal of veterans like Datuk

Azman Attar who pulled out from the contest for the leadership post of the Federal Territory's Batu Umno Division at the last minute.

Azman who had led the division for 12 years made the decision to make way for his deputy Datuk Azrat Gull Amirzat Gull to move up as the new leader.

Former Perlis Menteri Besar Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Pawanteh also had to cancel his earlier intention of withdrawing to comply with the party decision. The supreme council had determined which of its members should not be challenged during the elections.

Former Melaka Chief Minister Tan Sri Rahim Tamby Chik failed in his bid to return to active politics when he was defeated at Kota Melaka.

In Kedah, state exco Ahmad Lebai Sudin gave up his state position to contest the Pokok Sena divisional leader post, and won against the incumbent Datuk Paduka Abdul Rahman Ibrahim who is also a state exco.

Ahmad had to give up his exco post following the Menteri Besar's directive barring any state exco member without party post to contest the divisional leadership post.

According to Sabbaruddin, Umno will conduct a post-mortem of the conduct of the divisional meetings in its efforts to improve the weakness.

"Any management will do likewise, to improve," he said in a TV interview. All the party divisions completed their delegates' meetings on March 12.

During the period, the management and disciplinary committee directed several divisions to hold fresh meetings because of irregularities including the election of their leaders. --BERNAMA

AZZ AR ABG