

22/06/1998

Umno leaders back move to make lists public

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Umno leaders have come out in support of the party leadership's move to make public the recipients of privatised projects, saying that it shows the Government has nothing to hide.

Vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the call for greater transparency prompted the Government to release the lists of recipients.

He said this was to show that the distribution of projects and shares was based on equitable principles.

"The majority of those who were awarded projects and who received shares were the most able and qualified people in our society."

Najib said the lists negated allegations of favouritism in the awarding of projects and shares.

The allegations, he said, did not hold water.

Najib said while equitable distribution was the guiding principle, the Government was unable to award the same amount of projects and shares to everyone.

"We cannot make everyone millionaires," he said.

Najib said while there was nothing wrong in awarding projects and shares to politicians, it would be wrong for those in administrative and policy-making positions to provide for their relatives.

The list of recipients of privatised projects was released at the Umno general assembly on Saturday, while four more lists were released today.

The lists contained names of those who received special Bumiputera share allocations, shares in private companies, board members of class A contractors and licences issued to public transport companies and names of the board members.

Party secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said the lists were not "classified" since the information could be obtained from the Registrar of Companies.

"The lists are complete for now and if there are requests later we will update them."

Umno Youth deputy chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said he viewed the move as an effort towards strengthening the party and preparing it for future challenges.

"The question of whether the movement had erred in criticising the practice of cronyism and nepotism does not arise.

"We have always been in the frontline on various issues. Don't just pick on one issue and say that we are wrong. Nevertheless, we are responsible for our action. If it is negative and destroys the party, we have to be answerable to that."

Asked whether the movement was now satisfied and would stop pursuing the issue, he said one had to make one's own analysis.

"This is what Umno Youth has been saying in the past. You have to determine yourself whether it is good or bad.

"There is no question of backing down as we are not fighting the Opposition here.

"If there are weaknesses, we overcome them. If there is strength from this, we should build on it."

On whether making the information public would silence critics of nepotism and cronyism, he said this could not be determined now but he felt that the move was made in response to delegates' call for transparency in dealing with the issue.

Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said from the lists, he did not see any quarters being given the preferential treatment in the privatisation policy. "I am satisfied with the lists. They should dispel any notion that the benefits of privatisation are monopolised by certain quarters."

Supreme council member and Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar said the disclosure proved that the Government had nothing to hide.

Abu Hassan said the information also showed that the projects were awarded to qualified companies as well as those which had the capability to carry out the projects.

"The Government, through departments such as the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department, imposed certain criteria and made careful evaluation before awarding the projects.

"It is not based on nepotism or cronyism as claimed by certain quarters.

"I hope Umno members will be satisfied with the disclosure and stop making accusations in future," he said.

Abu Hassan said if the companies were qualified, their connections with parties or leaders should not be an obstacle to securing a particular project.

"We cannot stop those who are qualified. We cannot victimise a person who is qualified simply because he or she is close to somebody," he said.

Asked if the lists would be used to undermine the party and certain members, Abu Hassan said:

"The lists are to explain as well as to avoid prejudice, and at the same time show that the Government is transparent.

"Therefore, the Government should not be accused of favouritism or taking sides."

Supreme council member Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said the lists were released not because of pressure from any quarters, in particular Umno Youth.

Rafidah, who is also Minister of International Trade and Industry, said the lists, which revealed that those who met the criteria were eligible to benefit from the Government's privatisation policy regardless of their "connections", should dispel any suspicion.

"The national interest always comes first and if the national interest can be boosted by merit, qualification and sound criteria in decision making, then that should be our guiding principle."

Supreme council member Datuk Mustapa Mohamed described the lists as proof that the Government was transparent and free from cronyism and nepotism.

Grik division chief Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali, who is Deputy Home Minister, said the release of the lists had helped to clear the wrong perceptions about the distribution of projects by the Government.

"Although some of those who benefit are members of the Government, they are qualified to do the job.

"The lists also proved that not all cronies were given projects," Tajol Rosli said.

On the suggestion that the lists confirmed the projects were awarded to cronies, he said:

"We have to give projects to people we know and whom we have confidence in ... if we don't have confidence in them, how could we trust them to carry out the work efficiently?"

He said with the lists, the members could now fully understand the situation and continue to rally support for the Government.

Kuala Kedah Umno Youth vice-chief Abdul Mutalib Harun said the lists showed that there was transparency in the Government.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has proven that there is

no practice of nepotism and cronyism within the party," he added.

However, he suggested that in future, privatised projects should also be awarded to many more qualified Bumiputera companies.

"The lists showed that some companies are monopolising a number of projects.

"We would like to suggest that other qualified Bumiputera companies be given due consideration.

"We hope to see fair distribution of the projects among the qualified Bumiputera companies," he added.

Kelantan Wanita Umno chief Zaleha Hussin said the move showed that the Government was transparent.

"It also shows that the Government had distributed fairly the economic cake among the people," she said, adding it had also enabled the people to gauge the actual situation in the party and that the Government had not practised nepotism and cronyism.

Zainab Abdul Rahman, the Pokok Sena Wanita Umno chief, said the Prime Minister could now, based on feedback from the public, find ways to resolve the issue.

She said a matter of concern was that the "people from outside" would find means to twist the matter.

"They are capable of it as they are jealous of our achievements and the calibre of our leaders."

Sri Gading Umno divisional head Datuk Mohamad Aziz said the Government was prepared to be transparent and privatised projects could be given to any capable Malaysian.

"It shows that the issue of nepotism and cronyism did not arise. If we look at the lists, we will see that everyone had been given a chance."

Parit Sulong Umno divisional head Tan Sri Redzuan Salim said he could not understand the fuss about the issue.

"I do not even know most of them (on the lists)," he said.

(END)