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Abdullah-Slander

FIVE SERIOUS DEFAMATORY CASES FOR LEGAL ACTION

KUALA LUMPUR, April 12 (Bernama) -- Five serious defamatory cases are being considered for legal action by the Umno legal panel, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

Without revealing the cases, he said the panel of lawyers appointed by the anti-defamation committee set up by the party recently, were studying every aspect of the cases.

" This is not merely to scare them but a serious action as defamatory remarks are being made freely including at public ceramahs and while giving sermons" he told reporters after chairing the committee's meeting here.

He hoped Umno's move to take legal action on the defamatory cases would not be seen as an attempt to silence the critics as this was not Umno's intention.

" Under healthy democratic practices, we can accept criticisms reflecting the stance of political parties including the opposition but the situation we see now is totally different, said Abdullah, who is also Umno vice-president.

Abdullah hoped Umno's action could prove that the party, which had existed for such a long time, did not want to see uttering defamatory remarks or statements becoming part of the political culture in Malaysia.

He said defamation cannot be allowed to continue as not only it could lead to lost of power and collapse of governments but also ruin businesses, families and organisations.

He said Islam strongly forbid acts of slander.

At the meeting attended by Umno divisional leaders from throughout the country, two members of the legal panel and its chairman Datuk Ibrahim Ali explained elements of defamation and evidence required to pursue court action.

Abdullah said apart from gathering information on defamatory cases for possible action, the panel would explain to party members at all levels on its functions and responsibilities.

He said the Umno Defamation Committee which recently appointed a panel of 20 lawyers received good response from divisional leaders who offered their cooperation to achieve the desired objectives.

Asked whether Umno was prepared to face court action if it was sued for alleged slander by opposition parties, Abdullah said it was not a problem for the party.

" I don't care if others want to take legal action against us (Umno)... it is not a problem for us. The problem to deal with is slander," said Abdullah, who is performing the duties of Umno deputy president.

Ibrahim was reported to have lodged a police report at the Kota Baharu police station on the distribution of audio cassette tapes defaming Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and calling for the assassination of Umno leaders.

-- BERNAMA

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