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Campaigning allowed (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Umno supreme council today allowed campaigning in the party elections in May but candidates have to observe a code of ethics to keep out money politics and abuse of power.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the code was to ensure that the election process was free of unhealthy practices.

Campaigning was banned in the last party election in 1996.

Speaking at a Press conference after chairing a four-hour meeting of the council at Menara Dato' Onn, the Prime Minister said the regulations were not intended to curb the freedom of members but to ensure the party remained intact.

"Umno is a free party ... but if members want to go against it (the code of ethics), they must be prepared to face the consequences," he said.

The code was drafted by the party management and disciplinary committee chaired by vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

In 1996, other restrictions were also imposed prior to the party elections.

Delegates were not allowed to demand money, favours or trips from candidates in exchange for votes. Party programmes were also postponed to prevent candidates from using them as campaign platforms.

On whether the code of ethics would be seen as infringing the rights of members, Dr Mahathir said there were codes of ethics everywhere and that human beings needed guidelines in life.

On why candidates were now allowed to campaign, Abdullah said the decision was made following a meeting with divisional secretaries who argued that a ban on campaigning would be unfair to candidates, especially the new ones.

Elaborating on the code of ethics, Abdullah said it was divided into three categories - money politics, abuse of power and restrictions on divisions and branches. Offenders would be banned from contesting.

Among the restrictions are:

- \* Giving out gifts;
- \* Threatening to sack or demote someone if they do not nominate them as candidates. Promises of promotions are also disallowed;
- \* Candidates cannot invite delegates to functions like dinners which are paid for from their entertainment allowances;
- \* Footing the food and lodging bills for delegates to the assembly;
- \* Making use of their positions to win votes i.e a candidate who chairs a State Economic Development Corporation cannot use SEDC buses to ferry delegates and observers to the assembly;
- \* Divisions and branches are not allowed to organise activities and events for candidates; and
- \* Seeking sponsorship from candidates to finance their activities.

Asked whether the decision to allow campaigning would make the election more intense, Dr Mahathir said:

"We will not know whether it will be intense or not.

"If newspapers don't give too much coverage, it will be less heated.

"There is no need to pay much attention to Umno election stories. There are many other stories that can be reported."

(END)