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Mahathir-Umno

NOTHING SHOCKING ABOUT TANAH MERAH'S NOMINATIONS, SAYS PM

LANGKAWI, March 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Tanah Merah Umno division's nomination of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah to contest both the president and deputy president posts in the Umno elections in May does not surprise him at all.

"I'm not surprised about anything, I don't see anything, I only see reporters now," he said when reporters approached him for his reaction to Tengku Razaleigh being nominated for the party's top two posts.

Tengku Razaleigh, who is Kelantan Umno liaison chairman, had earlier secured one nomination from the Gerik Umno division for one of the three vice president posts.

Dr Mahathir said there was nothing Umno could do since the party Supreme Council had already issued its advice on the matter (of no contest for the two top posts).

The prime minister was here on an overnight trip to inspect development projects.

"What was conveyed before was merely an advice.

"Our advice is unlike the advice of the British (colonial masters then) that we must obey it. If it (the council's advice) is not obeyed..we can't do anything about it because we've given the advice. The Supreme Council's advice is a sound one. That's all. I've no comment", he said when asked further whether Tanah Merah division had ignored the council's advice.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, was also asked on the possibility of other divisions following Tanah Merah's example.

The prime minister replied:"I don't know."

Dr Mahathir said he was unsure whether what the Tanah Merah division did could split the party and that he would rather "wait and see".

The prime minister said he did not think there was no credence to claims that certain quarters were involved in candidate-fixing for the coming Umno polls.

"I don't know whether it's true or not but I hope it's not," he said. commenting on Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's concern over Umno divisions being blocked from nominating him and some others for the party vice president posts.

Muhyiddin, who lost in the election for the vice presidency in 1996, said Umno members reserved the right and be allowed to determine who should be on the nomination list for the May party polls.

On claims that the requirement for candidates to secure certain percentage of nominations to gain eligibility to contest would only benefit certain quarters, Dr Mahathir said it was rather late now to review it.

However, a motion to review it could be tabled at the party general assembly or other appropriate forum, he said.

As for the three vice president posts, the ruling requires a member to secure at least 10 per cent or 17 nominations from the 165 Umno divisions before being eligible to contest.

Muhyiddin had asked the party to give this matter attention for fear that certain quarters would use the requirement for selfish ends.

Meanwhile in KUANTAN, Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said Tanah Merah's nomination of Tengku Razaleigh for both the party presidency and the post of deputy president in defiance of the Supreme Council's advice was bound to disappoint council members.

Khalil said such disappointment was understandable given that at this

point of time consolidating party unity was uppermost.

Efforts towards that end should not be undermined by the repercussions of a tussle for top party posts in the coming party polls, said Khalil, who is also Information Minister and Member of Parliament for Kuantan.

He was speaking to reporters after opening an IT centre for the Beserah state legislature seat.

Meanwhile in SUBANG near KUALA LUMPUR, Umno vice president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said he was convinced that party divisions which have yet to hold their delegates' conference would heed the council's advice for no contest for the top two posts for the sake Umno's stability throughout.

Najib also dismissed the possibility of Tanah Merah division being penalised for not heeding the council's advice.

He said: "There will be no action, it is within their rights. I believe the majority of the divisions will accept the Supreme Council's advice."

-- BERNAMA

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