

19 NOV 2000

Umno-Government

UMNO WOOS GROUP A CIVIL SERVANTS TO BOOST PARTY STRUGGLE

By: Muin Abdul Majid

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 19 (Bernama) -- Umno has finally raised the curtain restricting the active involvement of Group A government officers in politics with the amendment of a related party constitution.

The new ruling adopted by the one-day Umno special general assembly to amend the party's constitution yesterday allows for such officers to contest party posts, which was not the case previously.

Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told a media conference at the end of the assembly that the officers concerned would still need to follow the guidelines of the General Order pertaining to their involvement in politics.

Many in the party had been clamouring for the restriction to contest party posts for Group A civil servants to be reviewed as they are seen capable of contributing positively for the party with their experience and expertise.

And their prayers were answered yesterday.

Cuepacs, which is the umbrella body for the more than the 800,000 civil servants in the country, has welcomed the Umno decision, saying that it is fair since those people who joined the private sector could contest party elections.

"We should not shut them off...why discriminate against them," its president, N. Siva Subramaniam, said today.

He said this was a move in the right direction as government officers could play a role in explaining and promoting government policies to the rakyat effectively.

"We also feel that department heads should go on the ground to explain government policies, including to their subordinates. Only one or two of them do that now," he said.

He said among the issues that needed to be explained were the Vision School policy, the Smart Partnership concept and the dialogue process between officers and the union.

Contending that not all Group A civil servants would want to dabble in active politics, he nevertheless said the country needed them.

He also said a study by Cuepacs showed that civil servants were still supportive of the government.

But Group A government officers wishing to contest and hold party posts would need to think hard before doing so as there is the business of the General Order.

Rule 21 (1) of the General Order for Civil Servants (Conduct and Discipline) 1993 prohibits officers in the Top Management Group and the Management and Professional Group from taking active part in any political party.

While they cannot contest or hold any party post, Rule 21 (5) does not bar civil servants from the groups from becoming ordinary members.

They are also required to inform their heads of department about their membership of the political party concerned.

And Dr Mahathir said yesterday that the government had no plan to amend the General Order at the moment.

At present, government officers wanting to plunge into active politics, for example by holding positions such as divisional chief or committee member, would have to resign from their government jobs.

Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali said in February this year that the ban against active involvement of Group A officers in politics would remain in force.

He reportedly said then that the Public Service Department was against its abolition for fear that they could not discharge their responsibilities

well and also, it could lead to rifts between officers and their subordinates.

The government, he said, did not want to have a chaotic civil service as those in several Third World countries whose civil servants were directly involved in politics.

Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said it boiled down to a matter of choice.

He said other political parties, including the opposition, had been recruiting Group A government officers as members.

"If other parties can quietly accept them, why can't Umno do the same. The difference is that Umno is a transparent party," he said.

-- BERNAMA

MAM ES RM