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Written pledge by candidates to refrain from money politics

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PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - In an unprecedented attempt to stem money politics in Umno and promote a healthy election next month, 15 candidates bidding for senior posts have signed a pledge promising to do just that.

Anyone found breaching the pledge would have his or her misconduct exposed during the general assembly starting May 11, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The 15 are vying for the posts of vice-presidents, Wanita chief, deputy Wanita chief and deputy Youth chief. They signed a four-point pledge before Dr Mahathir, who is Prime Minister, last night.

Certified signed copies of the pledge verified by Dr Mahathir were distributed to the media at the Press conference.

Those contesting for the 25 supreme council seats are also expected to sign a similar pledge at a later date.

Speaking at a Press conference at his office today, Dr Mahathir said Umno liaison committees planning to hold State-level party conventions would have to postpone them until after the general assembly. This is to prevent the conventions from being used for campaigning purposes.

The Prime Minister said: "We want to eradicate corruption in all places. If prospective national leaders are involved in corruption, our country will be ruined."

Describing these measures as a realistic means to stem money politics, Dr Mahathir warned candidates of the consequences of breaching the pledge.

"I am not convinced that there will be no campaigns (in next month's elections). But if I find that there are, I will expose the person who is campaigning at the general assembly."

During his meeting with the 15 candidates last night, Dr Mahathir said they expressed their concern about money politics, which prompted them to sign the pledge.

"They complained that if they did not campaign, someone else would. So I told them nobody should campaign and they accepted this."

Asked how those who made the pledge would be monitored, Dr Mahathir said the party had people to do this, but declined to name them as it would "attract the attention" of the candidates.

"I know that at this time, there are 600 delegates in Kuala Lumpur meeting with this and that person. I also know that some MPs are so caught up with campaigning that they skip the Dewan Rakyat sittings."

Dr Mahathir said party leaders were aware of delegates to the assembly going round with candidates, hoping to get something for themselves.

"So, even if the candidates do not give money, sometimes they have to attend to these people."

"That is why the signatories of the pledge suggested that these people (delegates) cannot meet with candidates ... cannot go to their houses, cannot use other forms of communication such as fax or telephone to contact the candidates."

Dr Mahathir said the party realised that the telephone could be an effective campaign tool.

"I myself used the telephone to campaign in Ranau (in Sabah) and it seemed to be effective ... we won. So, we do not allow the use of telephone in campaigning."

Asked how faxes and telephone calls of candidates could be monitored to determine whether or not they are used for campaigning purposes, Dr

Mahathir said it might not be possible to monitor everything but information on their actions would still reach the party.

Dr Mahathir also sought the assistance of the Press.

"I would like to get the co-operation of the Press. The Press has contributed by making analyses, with television having all sorts of programmes to analyse this person and that person. This creates problems for the candidates.

"All will want (similar treatment) ... So I ask ... if you want to discuss about the merits and demerits of Umno, by all means do so. But don't discuss the merits and demerits of Umno leaders.

"We don't want you to interview the candidates. The candidates are held incommunicado ... because they can campaign through the Press too. But in their usual government work, they can speak to the Press.

"For example, if say, Syed Hamid is asked about Sipadan, he can answer. But nothing about Umno election."

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the misconception among some delegates that an Umno election was a means of enriching themselves through bribes and favours in return for votes.

"Yes, somebody so keen to win decided to give money to buy votes. Of course, you then corrupt the system," he said.

Dr Mahathir drew a comparison between the present situation pertaining to the party election and the time when Tunku Abdul Rahman was Umno president.

"I know of people who refused to become the people's representatives because they said they were not qualified.

"But nowadays, someone who has no qualification whatsoever, but has the money to pay his way ... this is the new culture in Umno."

Asked on the effectiveness of these measures to change the mindset of delegates, Dr Mahathir said: "We cannot find corruption-proof measures, but we try."

He said although corruption in Malaysia had not reached an alarming level as in some countries, preventive measures were necessary.

"In Malaysia, it is not yet institutionalised. We cannot tolerate this because one day you may elect a leader who is corrupt.

"At that stage, you cannot do anything because he has to support corruption as that is the way he can get power," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked whether Menteri Besar or Chief Ministers who lose in the contest for vice-presidency would still be appointed to the supreme council, Dr Mahathir said such a practice was not "legally assured" in the party constitution.