

Wide debate on 'bar the rich' idea

SUN, 29 APR 2001

By G. Shamala

shamala@thesundaily.com

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's proposal to bar the rich from contesting posts in Umno was debated widely in *Utusan* and *Berita Harian*.

While several cabinet ministers expressed their support and were confident that the Umno supreme council will accept the proposal, Umno Youth vice-head Datuk Aziz Sheikh Fadzir was among those who differed in their opinion.

The proposal is aimed at addressing money politics but Aziz said the youth wing hoped the prime minister was not blaming all those who are rich for problems in the party, just because a few members may be involved.

"Not all the rich will use money for their own self interest as there are those who will channel money for the benefit of the party," he said.

The move, including another proposal that those holding party positions be denied government contracts, also received a response from the Malay Contractor's Association of Malaysia.

Its president Roslan Awang Chik said the association hopes to get an explanation on the matter from the

prime minister.

"The proposal needs thorough study, including the question of a mechanism to implement it as well as define what factors make the contractors eligible for government projects.

"Some contractors have been in the business years before becoming Umno division and branch heads. Are they supposed to shift occupations now?" he asked.

Utusan also quoted Umno supreme council member Datuk Azmi Khalid who agreed with the prime minister, but questioned how it can be implemented.

"We have to find ways to ensure that if they are not allowed to contest, they do not sponsor others to do so," he said.

Most Umno leaders who supported the move, however, wanted the issue to be discussed at length by the Umno supreme council.

The issue continued into the week with Mahathir saying that rich Umno members must declare their assets before contesting for important positions within the party.

"The move is not to stop the rich from joining Umno but to prevent them from contesting. No need to contest and no need to be division leaders. We will determine how

those who are sincere about contesting are not prevented from doing so simply because they are rich," *Utusan* quoted him.

Another issue which continued to receive wide coverage in both the papers this week was the Amanat Hadi - a "decree" issued by PAS deputy president Abdul Hadi Awang.

On Monday *Berita Harian* front-paged a report saying the government will set up a special panel to call individuals who voluntarily offer themselves as witnesses in relation to the Amanat.

A group of Muslims in Baling, Kedah, had expressed their wish to come forward with proof that the Amanat Hadi could cause disunity among Muslims in the country.

Utusan quoted PAS spiritual advisor Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat as saying that the party's supporters no longer paid any attention to the Amanat Hadi issue as it had become stale.

"People don't talk about or take any interest in the Amanat Hadi now as PAS supporters are aware that it was issued a long time ago."

The same day, Malacca announced that it will gazette the Amanat Hadi as contrary to Islamic teachings. The state also plans to impose a fine of RM50,000 or five years' jail on those found teaching

or explaining the Amanat Hadi.

This followed a circular sent by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin, to all state governments urging them to do so.

However, *Berita Harian* reported on Tuesday that many states are yet to comply with the directive.

The following day Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad was quoted as saying that Hadi must openly apologise for the negative effects his Amanat had brought about.

"Hadi must apologise as there are Muslims who remain confused because of the Amanat," he said.

PAS leaders too were asked to share the responsibility by providing explanations to their supporters, while Nik Aziz himself was criticised sharply for "washing his hands" off the problem when he said PAS supporters no longer paid any attention to the Amanat Hadi.

On Thursday, Hadi was quoted as saying he agreed to a *muzakarah* (discussion) with the National Fatwa Council on his Amanat.

He called on the council to set a date to solve the matter.

A third issue discussed in the Malay papers this week was the government's move to bring back the families of consulate officials in

Pontianak, Indonesia, after a group of people had demonstrated at the consulate in connection with a maid abuse case in Sarawak.

Utusan carried a report saying that local newspapers in Pontianak criticised Malaysia's move to close the consulate after receiving threats of a demonstration.

"The Malaysian government's move is too extreme as its concerns about a demonstration did not materialise," it quoted the *Pontianak Post*.

However, on Tuesday, *Utusan*, which stationed some of its staff at Pontianak, reported that the consulate was reopened to provide services to the people, including visa and passport services for Indonesians working here.

The issue came to rest when the Indonesian government paid RM22,000 in compensation to the maid who was apparently abused by her employers in Sibul, Sarawak.

Berita Harian quoted Indonesian Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab as saying that the amount was paid to fulfil claims by a group which continued to hold demonstrations at the consulate.

Following the payment, an agreement was signed by the group which agreed not to hold any more demonstrations.