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No more contracts (HL)

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JITRA, Sat. - Umno leaders at all levels may no longer be eligible for Government contracts while those aspiring to contest in future party elections may first have to declare their assets.

These are among proposals to be forwarded to the party's supreme council in an effort to curb money politics, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The party may also prohibit "wealthy individuals" from contesting posts as part of measures to wipe out money politics.

Asked how Umno would define a "wealthy individuals", Dr Mahathir said the matter would be studied by the supreme council.

Admitting that not all party members would be happy with the proposals, he said such measures were necessary to prevent corruption from becoming a culture of the Malays.

"I don't think all of them will be happy but there are some who will be supportive (of the proposals) ... there will (also) be some who will threaten to join the opposition but this is something we have to face," he said.

However, the Prime Minister expressed confidence that Umno would still be able to attract people to join the party if such measures were introduced.

"We are confident of not only attracting people to join but also discouraging people who think they should join Umno to get financial benefits."

He said this when asked to elaborate on his speech when opening the Kubang Pasu Umno division delegates' meeting at Dewan Jitra here.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir, who is also Kubang Pasu division chief, said public perception of Umno was that it had become corrupted at all levels.

He said Umno needed new measures to check this unhealthy trend.

On April 16, the Umno supreme council decided that the Anti-Corruption Agency would be called in to act against those found guilty of money politics.

This is in addition to internal action by the party's disciplinary board.

Citing the sudden interest among members to attend branch meetings during party elections, he said these members were not really interested in Umno's struggles but they wanted to make some money out of it if they could.

"They consider election year good for them because they can make RM10, RM20 or RM100... Some are promised trips to Medan, Haadyai and Golok while others are even taken to perform umrah.

"I know even in this hall, there are those who had taken (money) and given."

To overcome the problem, there was a need to ask aspiring candidates to declare their assets and to prohibit those who were rich from contesting.

The party might not award government contracts to leaders at all levels. This was necessary to discourage people who joined merely to get special privileges from the Government.

"It's not that we want Umno to become a poor man's party, we want it to be clean," he said. Those who thought money was more important should quit the party and concentrate on business.

Elaborating on the proposal to prohibit wealthy members from contesting,

Dr Mahathir said such people tended to use money to influence delegates decisions' and the party wished to discourage this.

On Kubang Pasu division, Dr Mahathir said he had heard disturbing reports about money politics being practised but he had no specific evidence.

Dr Mahathir also said he received reports that Umno members who openly supported the Opposition had taken part in the on-going party elections.