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## Support for tough measures against money politics

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Several Umno leaders have expressed support for tough measures against money politics in the party but said preventing wealthy individuals from contesting posts may not be the best solution.

Pointing out that Umno is a party for everyone, rich or poor, they said that not all wealthy members indulge in money politics.

Yesterday, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said those aspiring to contest in future party elections might have to declare their assets.

Dr Mahathir also said Umno might also prohibit "wealthy individuals" from contesting posts as part of measures to curb money politics.

He said this after opening the Kubang Pasu division meeting.

Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said the party must carry out an in-depth study on whether or not party leaders should be given government contracts and to prohibit "wealthy individuals" from contesting for posts.

Hishammuddin said Dr Mahathir's call was an illustration of his frustration in combating money politics and indicated his relentless efforts to wipe out graft within the party.

"However, I personally believe there is no short cut solutions in solving money politics. And Umno is an 'inclusive' and not an 'exclusive' party that gives opportunity to all members to be leaders, be they farmers or a professionals."

Hishammuddin, who is also the Youth and Sports Minister, said this to reporters after opening Tenggara Umno division meeting today. He is the division's head.

"The issue of money politics has often been over highlighted that it gives a perception that it is prevalent in all Umno divisions. This is not true."

"There are still many divisions free of money politics, where elections have been carried out smoothly and leaders returned unopposed. We must give due credit to divisions that have been free of money politics too," he said.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Mohamed Najib Abdul Razak said Dr Mahathir's proposal stemmed from worry that the party was becoming increasingly influenced by money politics.

"When money politics start to dictate the direction of the party, Umno will begin to lose its image and credibility over time," he told reporters after opening the Subang Umno delegates conference in Kelana Jaya.

Najib said judging from Dr Mahathir's proposal, there seems to be a need to compartmentalise Umno leaders.

"If we are serious politicians, we should concentrate on party matters. But if our aim is to make financial gains, then it is wrong to vie for party posts."

He said there was a need to draw a line between the two aims, adding that party posts must be limited to only those who are committed and ready to serve the party's struggle.

Replying to a question, Najib believed the proposal would definitely invite backlash from certain quarters within the party, but said Umno was prepared to face it for the good of the party.

"Of course, we also have to study the proposal carefully before enforcing it as a regulation. Matters like who is rich and who is not must

be clearly defined to face off criticisms," he said.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said today the proposal should be thoroughly studied as there are also members who are not that affluent but still indulge money politics,

He said there had been cases where ordinary members suddenly produced loads of money and bought votes during party elections, adding that this showed the practice was not only inherent among the wealthy.

"As such it must be discussed at the party's supreme council meeting," he told reporters after opening the Chenderoh Umno division meeting.

Muhyiddin said the proposals by Dr Mahathir showed that he was unyielding in his efforts to stop money politics and ensure that the party was clean.

He also said the Umno Constitution did not prohibit any individual, wealthy or poor, to join the party and contest for any post.

Muhyiddin, who is Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister, said money politics would never have occurred if members adhered to party regulations and ethics.

Asked whether the involvement of the wealthy in Umno had caused money politics, Muhyiddin said not all rich people misused their money to gain support or secure posts within the party.

On the proposal to bar Umno leaders from getting Government projects, Muhyiddin said if a person was eligible, there should be no restriction for him to get a contract.

He said one of Umno's main struggles was to create wealthy Malays and stressed that not all successful Umno members banked on their position to get Government contracts.

Umno chief Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali said Umno cannot prohibit the wealthy from becoming members as the party could lose out in terms of people's support especially when they turn to the Opposition.

He said Umno needed people from all walks of life, regardless if in order to remain relevant to the country and its people.

"What the party wants is that its members not use their riches to secure posts within the party - this is the actual meaning in Dr Mahathir's proposal," he said.

Tajol Rosli said there were many rich individuals who had not resorted to money politics and therefore it was unfair to generalise that all of them practised it.

Tajol Rosli, who is also Menteri Besar, said what was important was that members be loyal and bound to the party's code of ethics.

Umno supreme council member Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam called for clear guidelines in the proposal to prevent rich people from contesting in divisional or branch elections.

"The guidelines must stipulate the income that qualifies a person to be considered as a rich person," he said at the Jasin Umno division meeting.

Umno supreme council member Datuk Lajim Ukin is confident that Dr Mahathir will consider the view of all quarters before making a final decision on barring "wealthy individuals" from contesting for posts.

"But we need to remember that a person who holds a party post needs money to carry out activities for the benefit of the division," Lajim who is the Deputy Chief Minister said after officiating the State-level Civil Defence Day held at Padang Merdeka, Kota Kinabalu.

Meanwhile, Sabah BN secretary Datuk Karim Bujang, who is also Beaufort Umno deputy chief, said while Umno must take a tougher stand against money politics, barring the rich from contesting for important posts may not be the best solution.

Karim said the suggestion to bar the rich must be studied carefully and the party had to define how much wealth was too "rich."

He added that the party should investigate individually each "rich" members, who are keen to contest in elections, to find out if they were sincere or had hidden agendas.

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