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Kelantan-Candidates

IS IT WISE TO NAME UMNO CANDIDATES IN KELANTAN IN ADVANCE ?

By: Roslan Ariffin

KOTA BAHARU: The Kelantan Umno's request to name its electoral candidates in advance for the coming general election found mixed reactions even within its own ranks.

The request, which is being scrutinized by the party heads at the national level, was forwarded with a hope that it would give an advantage to Barisan Nasional (BN) in the state ruled by Pas since the last three general elections.

The proposal, said its proponents, would offer more time for voters in Kelantan to get to know and evaluate their future candidates before giving their verdict in the ballot boxes.

The mixed bag of reactions on the request was anticipated, although each leader and member of Kelantan Umno has been looking for an effective formula to dethrone Pas, which is ever confident of continuing its dominance in the state's political landscape for the fourth consecutive term.

When announcing the proposal last month, State Umno Liaison Chief Datuk Mustapa Mohamed noted that a big number of Umno Divisional heads in Kelantan were agreeable to the move as they believed it could help to strengthen the party in the state.

"Many feel the naming of the candidates in advance would certainly give an advantage in terms of exposing the leaders to the people, instill confidence among voters and facilitate the party election machinery," he said.

PROPOSAL BEFORE PARTY

The proposal could overcome the infighting and sabotage experienced in the previous polls when disgruntled leaders who were not selected to contest, worked to the detriment of the party.

Mustapa has forwarded the suggestion to the party president, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi after obtaining a mandate from the majority of Umno Divisional heads in Kelantan and also from the grassroots.

One earliest reaction on the move came from Terengganu Umno, which announced its intention to follow suit as the party there is also in a similar predicament.

These developments prompted the Umno's Supreme Council to solicit the services of Tan Sri Muhammad Muhd Taib, one of the party's Vice Presidents, to look into the pros and cons of the proposal and forward a report to the party's Management Committee before a final decision is made.

Reactions also came from Umno's stalwart in Kelantan, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who in 1999 headed the BN's election machinery.

In welcoming the proposal, Razaleigh said that it's not wrong for Umno to implement the idea in the state as a political manoeuvre or for the sake of uniformity in the party's strategy and enhance the solidarity between the leadership and grassroots.

NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The Supreme Council member however conceded that the proposal is not infallible and the negative implications from the implementation of the

proposal could be detrimental for Umno in Kelantan.

"The worst is we would be the first to face the consequences (if it fails)," he laments.

Tengku Razaleigh who is also the Member of Parliament for Gua Musang admitted the fact that several Umno leaders were skeptical on the wisdom of the proposal and had voiced their reservations as the candidates announced in advance would have to bear greater scrutiny by the public, thus putting them under tremendous pressure.

"Someone told me, it's the end of him if chosen in advance as a candidate. Even before being elected the candidate has to shoulder the burden including financially... at the end of the day we would have a candidate riddled with problems," he said.

According to him there may not be much difficulties in implementing the proposal and achieving its goals as long as all levels of Umno leadership in the state unite and give priority for the party's struggle.

Another leader in the Kelantan Umno, Datuk Annuar Musa, who was the Deputy Liaison Chief of Kelantan Umno for several terms before being replaced by Zaid Ibrahim last January, also begged to differ.

Annuar who is also a supreme council member felt it would bring more harm than good to the party as it would put Umno candidates under tremendous pressure, thus giving the opposition the advantage.

HOPES ARE TOO HIGH

Among the risks, he said, were the high hopes and scrutiny that the named candidates would be subjected to, and in the end the candidates might turn out to be unpopular.

"This is also suicidal as we are making our candidates vulnerable for the opposition," he said.

Several Kelantan PAS leaders also said there was nothing much for Umno to gain by announcing their candidates early, and described the move as "suicidal".

One of them said it was not difficult to guess what would happen (if Umno announces its candidates in advance) as one thing for sure, those who were not selected would resort to "sabotage".

"The selected candidate has to work hard using his own financial resources and machinery as the fellow members who were not chosen wouldn't want to lend a hand.

"The end result is the proposed candidate is exhausted even before he enters the battle field and this would cause Umno to replace the candidate with a new one and the vicious cycle continues even until the elections," said the PAS henchman who declined to be identified.

PAS IS AWARE OF THE TRAP

He said PAS would certainly avoid the enemy's trap, while Umno could end up "shooting at their own selves".

Mustapa however debunked such notions and held strongly to his conviction that the strategy has lots of merits, especially in uniting Umno -- something greatly feared by PAS.

For him, the proposal is a brilliant strategy that would bind all Umno leaders and members in confronting PAS.

However, a political observer recommended an easier and safer way in naming Umno or BN's candidates.

He said Mustapa only need to inform the selected candidates in his list discreetly. The result was that they would work hard for the party and at the same time no party members would feel left out.

"The move would eliminate indirectly the problems associated in the selection of candidates and is suitable as ample time is given to the

candidates to gear up," he said. -- Bernama
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