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Umno-Razaleigh

TENGGU RAZALEIGH ANNOUNCES BID FOR UMNO PRESIDENCY

By: Roslan Ariffin

GUA MUSANG, July 9 (Bernama) -- The excitement in the run-up to the Umno elections in September picked up a few notches today with the announcement by party veteran Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah that he wants to go for the president's post.

Tengku Razaleigh in making the announcement before some 1,000 delegates to the Youth and Women's wings of the Gua Musang Umno division at their meeting here, said he made the decision to "keep alive democratic practices apart from enabling me to continue my struggle in the party".

The former finance minister said it was now up to the Umno divisions at their on-going meetings whether to nominate him for the top post.

In order to be eligible to contest the presidency, Tengku Razaleigh needs to garner at least 30 per cent of the nominations from the party's 191 divisions which are meeting until July 22.

Amidst thunderous applause from the delegates, Tengku Razaleigh said: "So on this good day and good month, in front of all of you and due to the urging and request from friends, I feel it is not something extreme if I were nominated for the president's post".

"If I get enough nominations as stipulated by party constitution, I'm prepared to consider accepting the nominations," said Tengku Razaleigh, who is affectionately known as Ku Li.

While making the announcement, the meeting hall reverberated with loud shouts of "Hidup Ku Li" (Long Live Ku Li) by his supporters.

Tengku Razaleigh, who is also Gua Musa Umno division head and an appointed member of the party's supreme council, said he was making the announcement because "the president's post is vacant".

"The post is still vacant and the ones who are responsible in deciding are the Umno members through the delegates' meetings in the various divisions throughout the country.

"Furthermore, as far as I know, no one has offered to contest the post

apart from myself now. I hope I will get the support from the divisions if they think that I'm eligible and suitable".

"If it is thought that I'm not qualified, what to do. This is merely an offer to serve from someone who has been very long in the party but without any post, but still full of spirit to work for Umno," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is acting Umno president following the retirement of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad last October.

On Thursday, Tengku Razaleigh suggested that the quota system for contesting posts within Umno be abolished and dropped hints that he was prepared to go for the top party post in the September polls.

Following this, various party officials, including Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Idris Jusoh, advised Tengku Razaleigh to go for the vice president's post instead, saying it was more suitable for him.

Tengku Razaleigh, 66, first became Umno vice president in 1975 at the age of 29 and was re-elected in 1978 and 1981.

As leader of what was then known as "Team B", he mounted a challenge against Dr Mahathir for the presidency in the 1987 party polls but was narrowly defeated by the then prime minister who obtained a majority of only 42 votes.

Since then, the Umno presidency has never been challenged.

Tengku Razaleigh also lost twice in his bid for the Umno Deputy President's post to Tan Sri Musa Hitam, the then deputy prime minister, in 1981 and 1984.

Following his 1987 defeat to Dr Mahathir, Tengku Razaleigh left Umno and formed the breakaway Parti Semangat 46. But when the party was dissolved, he rejoined Umno.

In announcing that he was again going for the Umno presidency -- which by tradition carries with it the post of the prime minister -- Tengku Razaleigh expressed hopes that this latest development would not raise various interpretations but instead all sides should respect the spirit of democracy in the party, adding that he was leaving it to party members to

decide.

Tengku Razaleigh said everyone should accept whatever decision made by Umno members "in the family spirit and there's no necessity for anger, sadness and animosity. This is our hope, this is our big Umno family".

"Because I don't have intentions other than this. If I can be supported, please support. If not, you don't have to. There's no coercion, and no lobby," he said.

He said by making the announcement, he hoped to clear whatever doubts and assumptions made through the media from among his friends, Umno officials and leaders.

"Actually I did not want to make this announcement but like I said earlier, if there are nominations, if I'm considered qualified and suitable, then I'm prepared to consider accepting the nominations.

"It is up to all of you. I can't do more than this because I have nothing, I'm just a lone ranger. You are my strength in order to be able to advance for the sake of the Malays and myself," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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