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PM: Minimum nomination system cannot be set aside

By Zubaidah Abu Bakar

SUBANG, Fri. - The "minimum nomination" system for contesting posts in the Umno Supreme Council cannot be set aside for this year's party elections.

The reason: The system was the result of a decision by the general assembly, the highest decision-making authority in Umno.

Acting Umno president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said: "It is the decision of the general assembly, not the Supreme Council."

He pointed out that he did not create the system.

Abdullah was commenting on a proposal by Supreme Council member Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah that the minimum nomination system be abolished to ensure transparent and democratic party elections.

"I myself have been subject to the process of facing party elections with the minimum quota requirement," Abdullah told reporters at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base on his return from a three-day official visit to Saudi Arabia today.

Razaleigh, who is Gua Musang Member of Parliament, had said that party leaders had nothing to fear in abolishing the quota.

He has fuelled speculation that he may want to mount a challenge for the Umno presidency or deputy presidency by saying his supporters were pressuring him to contest and that he was willing to contest a "top" Umno post if nominated.

The Kelantan prince is no stranger to contesting the Number One and Two posts in Umno. He first contested and lost the Umno deputy presidency in 1981 and again in 1984, both times against Tan Sri Musa Hitam.

In 1987, he challenged Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the Umno presidency and lost again.

He later formed a splinter party called Semangat 46, which failed to get off the ground despite contesting in the 1990 and 1995 general elections.

In 1996, Razaleigh disbanded Semangat 46 and was accepted back into Umno by Dr Mahathir.

In 2000, his supporters sought to nominate him for the presidency and a deputy presidency. He received only one nomination for president and two for deputy, failing to qualify by not securing the minimum number.

The minimum nomination system was introduced to prevent frivolous challenges and their potential to disrupt party unity.

The minimum number of nominations to contest the post of president is 30 per cent of the 191 divisions, while for deputy president it is 20 per cent, for vice-presidents 10 per cent, and Supreme Council seats five per cent.

This means an aspirant for the presidency needs nominations from at least 58 divisions, deputy president 39, vice-president 20, and supreme councillor 10.

Youth and Wanita chief hopefuls need 20 per cent of nominations from their respective divisions, while the post of vice-chief for either movement requires 15 per cent of nominations, and for Exco seats five per cent. Only two nominations are needed to contest for any post in the Puteri movement.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Radzi Sheikh Ahmad said recently that the party was prepared to review the quota system if this was what Umno's three million members wanted. He said they could make a proposal to this effect at the party's September general assembly.

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