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`NGOs must register as political parties to contest in elections

KOTA KINABALU, Fri. - Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) must register as political parties in order to contest in the elections, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

However, he said if an NGO was not registered as a political party, its members could still contest the election in their individual capacity.

Giving an example, he said if an individual from Cuepacs wanted to contest, it was his or her right to do so as an individual.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on a report in Utusan Malaysia today which said that NGOs registered under the Societies Act could contest in the general election on condition that they registered with the Election Commission.

"They (NGOs) can contest if they are registered as political parties but as NGOs they cannot contest," he told a Press conference at the Kota Kinabalu international airport before leaving for Kuala Lumpur after an overnight visit to Sabah.

Dr Mahathir did not want to speculate if support for the Barisan Nasional would be affected if NGOs such as Cuepacs registered as political parties to contest in the general election.

In Kuala Terengganu, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said NGOs should not be allowed to function as a political party as both played a different role in society.

He said it was not appropriate for NGOs to be given a chance to register with the EC and allowed to participate in a general election.

"NGOs and political parties are different entities ... we have to understand this. This difference has been defined in an amendment of constitutions for societies in the 1980s to explain the functions of the two entities.

"If they (NGOs) are allowed to participate in a general election, many people will be disappointed because if they win, they would think that they are influential for fighting a cause.

"This may not be acceptable to society. But that is not important, what is, is that NGOs should have no political interest," he said.

Abdullah, who is chairman of the Terengganu Umno committee, was speaking to reporters after the luncheon with State Umno veterans.

When asked about individuals representing NGOs who wanted to contest in a general election, he said they could do so on their own.

"But I have to stress that amending the constitution of a society requires approval."