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Razaleigh-Umno (news analysis)

STAND OF TENGKU RAZALEIGH GETTING CLEARER

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

GUA MUSANG, May 25 (Bernama) -- Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46) president, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah chose the most suitable venue to declare his future direction in politics.

Yesterday before his supporters and Gua Musang residents, he spoke at length on steps at cooperation with Umno after Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also Umno president opened the door for talks.

"If we are forced to forgo S46, we will sacrifice S46 as Malay unity supersedes all," Tengku Razaleigh said, while previously he had always dismissed talk that the party would be dissolved.

The statement yesterday was important as it was made here - the constituency which he had represented for more than 20 years and marked another step forward in his efforts to bring his supporters back to Umno's fold.

Tengku Razaleigh and several of his followers formed S46 in 1988 after their efforts to revive Umno, whose registration was ruled unlawful by the court, failed in Parliament as did their appeal to the Supreme Court.

"S46 is merely a tool to operate legitimately to unite all Malays," he told the crowd.

Asked by reporters later, Tengku Razaleigh said S46 members understood the matter as "if the old Umno can be revived, S46 would have been dissolved long ago."

Although his efforts at reconciling with Umno had been severely criticised especially from PAS, S46's ally in Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah, which rules Kelantan, Tengku Razaleigh said "No apologies from me on this matter".

He rejected suggestions that he was now prepared to support Dr Mahathir for self interest and wanted a ministerial post.

"If I had wanted to be a minister, I would not have gone against Dr Mahathir in 1987 as I was then a senior minister," he said.

The contest for the post of party president in 1987 was a black spot in the history of Umno when supporters of the defeated group brought the case to court causing the party to be declared unlawful.

When Umno was set up again, Tengku Razaleigh and his followers did not join it but instead formed S46, which later had pacts with opposition parties providing an alternative to Barisan Nasional in the two previous general elections.

Tengku Razaleigh said as Dr Mahathir was now prepared to discuss the question of Malay unity, it was not wrong for him to accept Dr Mahathir's leadership.

This was not contrary to the principles of the party which aimed at uniting the Malays, said Tengku Razaleigh, who would continue with his schedule in Johor later this month and Pulau Pinang to explain the situation.

"God willing, I will soon meet Dr Mahathir to talk further and find ways on how to strengthen Malay unity," he said to applause from the crowd.

Dr Mahathir, who returned from a 12-day overseas trip yesterday said he was prepared to meet Tengku Razaleigh.

They had met twice in two months excluding a brief meeting when Tengku Razaleigh attended the opening of the party's convention held as part of Umno's 50th anniversary celebrations at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) in Kuala Lumpur on May 11.

While Tengku Razaleigh gets closer to Umno, relations between S46 and PAS get increasingly tense. Yesterday PAS secretary-general, Abdul Halim Arshat called on Tengku Razaleigh to take S46 out in a "gentleman fashion" from the Angkatan government.

"He can leave Angkatan amicably just like when he joined it in the 1990 general election," he told reporters after opening the Kelantan PAS Youth meeting in Kota Baharu.

Tengku Razaleigh stressed that S46 would not vacate its executive council seats as the party was also given a mandate from the people in previous general elections.

"If the head of the Kelantan government (Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat) despises S46 representatives in the council, he should dismiss them.

"If they want us to resign, we will not do so as we need to fulfil our obligation to the people," he said. -- BERNAMA

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