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Razaleigh says decision unexpected

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KUALA TERENGGANU, Thurs. - Kelantan Umno chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah today described the decision by the party's supreme council for him to sit in during the council's meeting as "unexpected".

He thanked Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for having trust in him, saying that he only knew about the matter after reading the newspapers.

"I did not expect it. As it is, I have a lot of work in Kelantan to ensure a convincing Barisan Nasional victory in the coming election.

"But I believe this will enable me and other council members to deliberate in greater depth about our preparation for the general election and plans to win back Kelantan (from Pas)," he said.

He was asked by reporters to comment on the decision by the Umno supreme council yesterday for him to sit in during the council meeting after a ceramah at Dewan Sivik Pasir Panjang.

Dr Mahathir had said the decision was made not by virtue of his State Umno position but because he (Razaleigh) needed to know deliberations of the council. Razaleigh said he had no idea what the Prime Minister had in store for him but believed with the support of friends in the council and hard work, the BN could wrest Kelantan from Pas.

On Kelantan Menteri Besar's political secretary Husam Musa's call for him (Razaleigh) to use the latter's good relationship with Dr Mahathir to write off the State's debts, he said: "It's not a problem. Hand over the Government to the BN."

He said all State Governments had debts but the loans taken were used for development purposes so that revenue could be raised to settle the debts.

"Pas only knew how to collect (money) from the people but had no plans to increase the revenue to help the people."

Earlier, he said he was well aware of Pas' strength in Kelantan and the party had undergone a lot of changes from one that was strong to one which was going through a "conflict".

"I have seen it all. Pas was strong in the past but today its leaders are more concerned with garnering support to win the election rather than fighting for Islam. I believe that Pas is losing support as most members have deserted the party and some have joined Umno."

Razaleigh said even if Pas could capture Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis, and retain Kelantan, the seats won would still be insufficient for the party to form a government.

He said support for Pas was waning in other States and its leaders were literally camping in Kelantan to ensure that the party did not lose the State to the BN. "The truth is, if Pas was influential, it would have been voted into power a long time ago.

"Now that the economy is recovering and the Government has again proven its ability in running the country, Pas has no other issues to harp on."

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