

Umno man backs full tenure for MB Khalid
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INTERVIEW Any political attempt to topple Selangor Menteri Besar Abdul Khalid Ibrahim from power should be stopped as it ignores the choice of the people, says Umno Cheras division chief Syed Ali Syed Alhabshee.

Though not an elected representative himself, the former senator said that for the sake of democracy, he would at least like to see Khalid ride out his second term as menteri besar.

Ever since PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim announced its 'Kajang Move' in mid-February, Khalid's position as the head of the Selangor government has been rocked by speculation.

"I am not close to him (Khalid), but he won the first term and in the second term, still won to take care of Selangor. That shows that the rakyat have faith in his administration. So, let him finish his work, lah.

"If anything is not right, let the people decide again," Syed Ali said in an interview with Malaysiakini in Cheras.

He then went on to warn that even though a political turmoil was taking place within PKR, the same could also happen in Umno if greedy politicians were given free rein in the country.

Syed Ali, who has helmed Umno's Cheras division since 1998, said politicians should serve the interests of their party first, rather than strive for positions.

"Come on, when we are hungry for positions, anything can happen... and not only in the opposition parties, it can also happen like that in Umno. When you start to be greedy, it's all the same, lah, with all the parties."

"And the ones who will lose out will be the rakyat," he said.

Old party hands don't need positions

Originally from Penang, Syed Ali said he joined Umno when he was only 18 years old and moved up the ranks to become the Cheras Umno chief in 1998. He is now also the Federal Territories Umno secretary.

Syed Ali has served as a senator in the Dewan Negara, under prime ministers Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Asked about Umno's chances in the next general election, GE14, the veteran politician said it all depended on the party's transformation efforts and whether stubborn, and yet clueless, leaders would give up their claimed strongholds.

"The leaders who are sitting comfortably, not wanting to leave their positions but sitting until they don't know what to do... they should be creative and help the party to become stronger," Syed Ali said.

He would not hang on to power, he added.

"For example, I am telling my division people that they all must get ready, for I want to give way to them. I am happy, and by 2016, somebody must be ready to take up my post."

As to whether he would be contesting for a parliamentary seat in GE14, Syed Ali shrugged it off.

"As a party man, I have never even thought of a position to threaten the prime minister," the Arab-blooded Malay said, explaining that the respect he often received as Cheras division chief for 16 years straight was enough.

"We are old party hands, we don't chase positions."

The Cheras Umno division celebrated its 20th anniversary in a lavish ceremony last month, with the presence of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and his wife Rosmah Mansor, Federal Territories Minister Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor and Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

That event, which, according to Syed Ali raised RM500,000 for charity, earned wide coverage by Umno-owned Utusan Malaysia. However, it also earned brickbats from former information minister Zainuddin Maidin.

Slim chances in Cheras

On BN's chances in Cheras come GE14, Syed Ali said the ruling party was still the underdog in the downtown Kuala Lumpur area, even though it was probably Malaysia's oldest and most successful political party. DAP has held on to the parliamentary seat of Cheras since 1995.

"I know in Cheras we cannot win, for it is a Chinese area. MCA has to do a lot of work, and we are only here to help," he said.

However, he went on to boast that among the nine percent of Malay voters in the area, Umno does have a good standing because the party has, through him, done a lot of community work in the downtown area.

Asked repeatedly on the BN strategy to win the seat, Syed Ali would just say that MCA had its work cut out in Cheras.

It would help, he added, if both MCA and Gerakan brought up their gripes at BN meetings, rather than shooting these off to the media ever so often.

“Please go through proper channels to criticise one another. Just don’t try to kill one another in public,” he said.

Syed Ali is also the chairperson of Yayasan Pendidikan Cheras College, which opened in 2011, and is aimed at giving affordable education to high school leavers. This would be his full-time task, he added, should he leave party politics in 2016.

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