

'Najib still has upper hand in corrupt Umno'

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By RK Anand

Pundits predict that the walls are closing in on the Umno president and he is operating on borrowed time. But a PKR leader believes that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak still has the upper hand.

The reason for this, according to Rafizi Ramli, is because Umno is "corrupt to the core".

"Najib still has the upper hand because it is the culture of Umno that who wields the power, could win the day.

"Because the prime minister controls the levers of power and patronage, it is possible for him to neutralise the internal opposition using carrots and sticks," he told Malaysiakini.

This, he stressed, was something which Najib knew well.

As for his detractors claiming that Najib is no longer popular, Rafizi pointed out that Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in a similar predicament in 1987 (when there was a challenge for the Umno presidency) and in 1998 (following Anwar Ibrahim's dismissal).

However, these incidents did not prevent the former premier from remaining at the helm until 2003.

Furthermore, Rafizi pointed out that unlike his predecessor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Najib would not cave in to pressure.

"All he needs to do is refuse to resign. Najib has no moral compass to take heed of people's perception (about his leadership).

"Although the stakes are getting higher for both sides, those who are pro-Najib and anti-him, I don't see him bowing out soon," he said.

Cabinet reshuffle on the cards?

The PKR vice-president also believes that the Tabung Haji-1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) land deal debacle could work in Najib's favour as it exposed his enemies.

"It (the controversy) has flushed out the quiet conspirators, now they are out in the open.

"For example, Muhyiddin Yassin (photo). Najib was aware that Muhyiddin is not loyal, but he needed an excuse to act and now he has one.

"The continued criticisms (against Najib) would come to a point that it borders on

insubordination," he added.

He said if the prime minister is confident of support from the grassroots and divisional leaders, Najib would have to move against the rebels swiftly.

Najib might even effect a cabinet reshuffle soon if he feels secure enough.

"But Najib must be careful not to take down too many foes as it would be difficult to manage numerous fall-outs," he added.

Rafizi also argued that Umno, at this juncture, cannot legally and constitutionally remove their president and the party polls is not due until next year.

The PKR leader also cautioned against allowing the current crisis to unravel without Umno being implicated in the alleged misdeeds.

"Mahathir and Muhyiddin are trying to sever the umbilical cord between Najib and Umno to create the impression that Najib is an evil of his own.

"The public must be reminded it is Umno's culture that produced the likes of Najib. Unless we change Umno, nothing would change," he said.

Rafizi also agreed that it is an issue of collective responsibility, therefore making it incumbent for the entire cabinet to resign over the 1MDB issue.

"They (members of the cabinet) knew all long, they are a party to it," he said, adding that the cabinet also agreed to set aside RM950 million as "standby credit" for the ailing firm.