

Key points you need to know about Umno's move against the PM

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Zikri Kamarulzaman

A flurry of political developments has taken place this week with Umno at the centre of it as the country continues to struggle with steeply rising Covid-19 cases.

With the developments spread over multiple days accompanied by rapid-fire delivery of political statements and news articles, it can be hard to keep track of every move on the political chessboard.

Malaysiakini breaks down the news to what you need to know.

What happened?

The Umno supreme council decided in the early hours of Thursday to retract support for Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

The move came less than 12 hours after Muhyiddin appointed Umno vice-president Ismail Sabri Yaakob as the deputy prime minister - an appointment that was supposed to placate the party.

Umno president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the Perikatan Nasional government led by Muhyiddin was a failure on multiple fronts including its Covid-19 response and called on the prime minister to resign.

Zahid also called for an interim prime minister to be installed to focus on vaccination efforts and to guide the country through the pandemic.

Does this mean the government has collapsed?

No, it doesn't for multiple reasons.

First, Attorney-General Idrus Harun said the loss of majority support can only be proven by MPs, not by a press statement. Until then, he said, Muhyiddin will stay in power.

Second, the Umno supreme council did not issue an order for its ministers to quit the government.

Former prime minister and former Umno president Najib Abdul Razak

Umno is only pulling support for Muhyiddin, not the PN government as pointed out by former Umno president Najib Abdul Razak.

This reduces the possible options, suggesting that Umno may seek to take over the leadership of the government without drastic changes involving parties in the ruling coalition.

So are all Umno MPs on board?

No. A majority of Umno lawmakers are aligned to Ismail Sabri and Sembrong MP Hishammuddin Hussein.

These MPs appeared to be behind a statement claiming that all BN MPs support Muhyiddin staying on in power - which Najib has disputed.

Curiously, while the Umno supreme council retracted support for Muhyiddin, it also gave its MPs free rein to use their discretion when voting in Parliament.

A leaked recording of the meeting has Zahid saying that MPs also have discretion during a vote of confidence.

Umno secretary-general Ahmad Maslan, however, said MPs should use the party's decisions as a guide.

Meanwhile, Umno's BN partners MIC and MCA are also sticking with the PN government.

Regardless, only a handful of Umno MPs need to defect to ensure that Muhyiddin loses majority support.

Analyst Wong Chin Huat said this would only result in Muhyiddin being the head of a minority government rather than being booted out of Putrajaya.

What is the opposition saying?

Several opposition lawmakers have called on Muhyiddin to resign following Umno's move.

The Pakatan Harapan presidential council disputed the attorney-general's opinion that the prime minister can stay on.

However, the council did not offer a solution to the impasse, stating only that it wants to focus on battling the Covid-19 pandemic.

Likewise, Pejuang chairperson Dr Mahathir Mohamad refused to back anyone and chose to focus on the pandemic which he proposes to solve via a National Recovery Council.

What's next?

It is unclear whether a vote of confidence will be held once Parliament convenes on July 26.

Previous attempts to hold a vote of confidence had been blocked by Speaker Azhar Azizan Harun.

However, defeating a major government bill in the Dewan Rakyat can be translated as a vote of no-confidence after which the prime minister will have to either dissolve Parliament or resign as per the Federal Constitution.

In the event Muhyiddin resigns but no one has a clear majority to head the government, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong can appoint a prime minister from whoever controls the largest bloc in the Dewan Rakyat to head a minority government.

So who does Umno want to be interim PM?

Zahid, in his statement, did not state who should be the interim prime minister.

However, he did say Umno would not support any effort to install his purported shadow ally, PKR president Anwar Ibrahim, as prime minister.

Nonetheless, Umno supreme council member Zahidi Zainul, who is in the pro-PN camp, believes the party's actions do open up the opportunity for Anwar to take over Putrajaya.

Zahidi cited the statutory declarations that Anwar purportedly secured with Zahid's help.

Umno vice-president Khaled Nordin, meanwhile, has said that Ismail Sabri can step up as acting prime minister should Muhyiddin resign.

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