

Umno sec-gen: We'll win, with or without Taib
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Umno is confident that BN would be able to retain Sarawak in the upcoming state elections even if Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud decides to step down.

Commenting on Abdul Taib's shock announcement yesterday that he was mulling calling it a day after 29 years at the helm, Umno secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor said regardless of his decision, it would not affect BN's chances.

"Maybe he realises that people in Sarawak need change. For us, we'll still be able to hang on to Sarawak whether he leads or other people lead," said Tengku Adnan, who is also BN secretary-general.

bn supreme council mt meeting sapp sabah issue 190608 taib mahmudHe was commenting on Taib's response on whether or not he will contest the upcoming Sarawak election, and if he will remain chief minister if he wins.

The veteran politician, who rose to leadership in 1981, said yesterday: "I don't know, it is up to the prime minister, Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) and the people to decide on my position.

"Well, a lot of people say I am not needed (any more). So if I am not needed, then I go out."

Umno not pressuring Taib

Tengku Adnan denied speculations that Umno was putting pressure on Abdul Taib to step down, who has been courting increasing bad press over the wealth accrued by his family.

"There is no pressure from our side, but we'll accept it if he wants to go. Maybe he's been in power for too long.

"When you've been in power too long, people get tired of you. He is also probably tired, so the statement he made is fair," said Tengku Adnan when contacted.

He said Ahmad Taib's situation mirrors that of former Umno president Dr Mahathir Mohamad who began planning his departure after BN suffered a dip in support in 1999.

"It is statesman-like to think of the state rather than just of himself. As far as we (Umno) are concerned, there are other leaders who will be able to take over if he chooses to step down," he said.

NONEDespite Tengku Adnan's denial, the prominence given to Taib's statement in Umno-linked newspapers has raised eyebrows.

The statement, while an expected response from a politician prior to an election, made the front-page of Berita Harian and given a full-page spread in the New Straits Times.

Taib was elected into parliament in 1967 and became chief minister in 1981. In 2006, he expressed his desire to step down due to ill health, but was prevented from doing so by party members.

Higher stakes for BN

Taib's withdrawal at this juncture would be timely as his increasing unpopularity has fast become a liability to BN.

In fact, said PKR Padungan assemblyperson Dominique Ng, Taib was the main cause for BN's defeat in the Sibu by-election in May.

azlan "Sibu was BN's stronghold. If they can lose Sibu, they can lose all the Chinese-majority (constituencies)," he said.

The unexpected loss has raised the stakes for BN in the state election, due to be called by the middle of next year.

Additionally, BN is under more pressure to win the Sarawak election which is being seen as representing a testing ground for the ruling coalition ahead of the next general election.

If he steps down, would it diminish Pakatan Rakyat's chances in Sarawak?

"It is irrelevant because our main problem is still BN policies. If he leaves, the next person to succeed him will still be a BN person," said Sarawak PKR chief Baru Bian.

As such, the PKR duo are banking on the hope that Sarawakians realise that "another Taib nominee" will not bring in the changes they desire.

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