

Khair's graft charge unlikely to blow a hole in Umno's hull
Malaysiakini.com
Disember 7, 2010

With Selangor Opposition Leader and former Menteri Besar Mohd Khir Toyo facing a corruption trial, all eyes are on how this will affect Selangor Umno.

NONEAt a glance, this may seem like a big blow to the Umno bastion, in which Mohd Khir had helmed for eight years during his two-term tenure as MB until the 2008 general elections.

But upon closer look, one would have said that Mohd Khir was also already on the fast track to political oblivion.

It all started when he lost the state to Pakatan Rakyat in the most recent general elections, prompting him to be dropped as the Umno liaison committee chairperson and replaced by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

Even the party's recent efforts in winning back the state through a series of ceramah in their "Save Selangor" programme several months back, the dentist-turned-politician was conspicuously missing from the lineup of speakers.

azlanThough many have denied a rift between the deputy Umno Selangor chief Noh Omar and Najib's most recent recruit Ezam Mohd Nor - the former PKR Youth chief - the writing is already on the wall for Mohd Khir.

Political analyst from UKM Mohammad Agus Yusoff also concurred that Mohd Khir's recent graft charge bore no significance as far the party is concerned.

"Before this, his role in Selangor had also diminished, being just the state assembly opposition leader and the division chief. He had absolutely no more positions in Selangor.

"So to say that his charge will rock the Umno boat when it comes to the state leadership, I just don't see it. I really don't," he said when contacted by Malaysiakini.

"When the party prepares for its state leadership reshuffle at the end of this year, Umno will need someone with the vision and mind to recapture the state. They will have to be in combat mode to prepare for the next general elections.

"Mohd Khir is the past. The party instead needs a fresh face who can bring change," said Agus.

Party leaders doesn't feel the pinch

Even at the grassroots level, local party leaders are playing down the charge with assurances that the party is still "strong" and "intact".

Kuala Selangor division leader Amiruddin Setro denied that the eventual trial will weaken Umno, saying that there are other capable leaders in the state.

Amiruddin - the state liaison committee member - said that the party strength does not just depend on certain individuals.

rufaqa raid 010307 abdul rahman palil "The issue does not affect the state Umno machinery. What is more important is that there is unity in the party," he said when contacted.

However, the state party leaders are already on their toes, waiting to rebut, the moment Pakatan plays up the issue.

Kapar Umno division chief and also the Sementa assemblyman Abdul Rahman Palil (left) said that they will be explaining the matter to the grassroots in retaliation to Pakatan expected attacks.

"Don't tell me that because of one person, our party falls apart. Let the court process decide everything," he said.

PKR: Selangor won't fall for pre-polls 'ploy'

Unsurprisingly, PKR - which has the most state assembly seats in Selangor - is not holding its breath.

Its leaders such as de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim has claimed that Mohd Khir's trial, and other "good news" announced by BN, was an election ploy.

azmin ali pc in parliament 020709 02 Newly-elected deputy PKR president Azmin Ali, also the Selangor liaison committee chairperson, is taking a more cautious position.

"It is a good pronouncement but its all merely political rhetoric and I can share with many in the country that (Najib) has failed to honour his promises to embark in major change.

"I think Selangorians are happy with present leadership with Pakatan where (MB Khalid Ibrahim) is seen as a strong leader managing the economy well," he said when contacted, adding that he will "wait and see" how things go when the trial starts.

Additional reporting by Abdul Rahim Sabri.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/150195>