

**Zaid : Umno needs reformasi**  
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exclusive Barely a week had passed after Kelantan Umno announced its list of candidates for the election that prominent lawyer Zaid Ibrahim found himself in Forbes Asia's list of the region's most generous philanthropists.

zaid ibrahim interview 140308 01Sharing the limelight with Syed Mokhtar Albukhary, Hishamudin Ubaidulla and Amar Leonard Linggi Jugah, it was with some surprise that the 57-year-old was left out of Umno's list of candidates.

Though Malaysiakini gave him the chance to indulge in a little "I told you so" after his replacement crashed to a 11,288-vote defeat, the former Kota Bahru MP graciously declined.

"I consider myself lucky not to be chosen. Even if I had contested, I would have lost. Maybe, not by such a big margin, but I would have lost too," said Zaid.

During the 2004 elections, Zaid pipped Nik Mahmood Nik Hassan by 1,723 votes to bag the Kota Bahru seat.

In an exclusive interview with Malaysiakini, Zaid said that among the factors contributing to Barisan Nasional's shocking losses were the weakness in leadership, arrogance and over reliance on slogans.

Although there are weaknesses in the present leadership, he however doesn't believe that calling for Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's resignation would solve the problems.

But he said allowing open contests in Umno, without the need for candidates to obtain an exceedingly high number of nominations, would be one of the many necessary reforms within the party.

"Pak Lah has talked about integrity before. So if he believes that, he should allow contests for the top two positions in Umno," said Zaid.

The following is the second part of Zaid's interview.

### **Malaysiakini: Should Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi quit?**

Zaid: No, I don't think that Pak Lah should resign now. He suffered a setback but he is still the leader of the party which commands the majority in Parliament. Technically he can stay and you can't fault him for that either.

abdullah ahmad badawi election announcement 130208 seriousThe more important question is "Should Pak Lah continue to lead Umno?" That I think should be decided by the party. I would like to see the best person lead the party of course.

People like to complain about Pak Lah but then who do we want to succeed him? There is Najib (Abdul Razak). But is he the best person to lead the party? Or would it be Tengku

Razaleigh (Hamzah)? It could be anybody.

This soul searching can only happen over time. Before you decide on the leader you have to consider what is the direction of the party. What do we want from Umno now?

Once, we have answered all these questions then we look for who is best to lead us in that direction. So, I don't think we should be saying now that Pak Lah should go and Najib should succeed but ask what kind of Umno do we want?

For that to happen then we need to go to the grassroots. And if a election is needed then so be it. I'm more interested in the process rather than the personalities. You may change the person but you are not going to change the party.

You can't change for the sake of changing. You change because the new person represents the new voice, new hope and the new idealism in Umno.

### **Is Umno on the right track now?**

At the moment it is not on the right track but I hope that Pak Lah will set it or find the right person for it. I think that Pak Lah should be gracious enough to offer the position for challenge.

I'm so sick of listening to leaders every time (party) elections is up they say "Ah, number one and two tak bertanding-lah". The newspapers would carry and the sycophants will sing the same tune. And when somebody wants to challenge, they say, "This person is disturbing the party and causing instability".

This is what I mean about dynasties. What is so special about one and two? If I have the means and capabilities, I would like to be Umno president too.

But why do we limit this to one, two or even three? Is this a heir to the throne? No, this is a democratic party. For changes to take place, Umno must first accept this premise.

### **Do you see any agitation on the ground?**

umno 2007 assembly 071107 overviewI would like to see more debate in the party. For years now, Umno is a very top-down party. You wait for the leaders at the airport, you kiss their hands and you say nothing about the insecurity of the party. You don't say anything because when you do, you'll have to get out. But that has to change.

I can sense a lot of dissatisfaction on the ground but the Malay people are very polite. You'll sense them getting angry when they start voting for the opposition. There must be more openness in the party to discuss matters.

### **Has Umno lost the support of the people?**

No, I don't think so. This is the result of just one election. Sure, they have upset a majority of the people but you never know as the opposition over the next five years can alienate people too. Politics, in this sense, is very fluid.

### **What about the quotas to contest in party polls?**

No need quotalah. No need. This was all introduced to make it difficult for people to contest for the top two posts. There are not many crazy people who want to fight for the top positions.

I'm not saying this because I want to see a fight in every election. And the people always like to "ampu" to be ketua cawangan (division chief), to calon (candidates) and so on and so forth. Why can't we just select people who are good? And we won't know if they are good unless we expose them to the wider group and let them contest each other.

### **Where do you see your political career heading?**

I'm not young anymore and I don't see it going very high up. I'm a realistic person. But I will contribute in my own ways. I can write, speak and talk about things...but to go back will be very hard.

Mind you, I'm from Kelantan and it took me 15 years to be division head and I just served one term before they suspended me. Do I want to spend another 15 years, working my way up? No, I don't think so.

### **During this election, we found that Umno wasn't as visible or vocal in Klang Valley. Is there something going on in Umno?**

I can't speak with any authority on this matter. But generally, Umno is not as efficient as everyone thinks. It depends a lot on the government machinery.

### **You say that Umno has strayed from its original track. What do you mean by that?**

They are not on the right track because leaders now make major policies and decisions which I don't think the members understand or approve very well. There are so many issues that alienated the people in this country.

Take corruption for instance. Do you think that Umno members don't care about corruption? They hear it all the time but they don't get the chance to voice their opinion, debate and engage this issue.

I think the issues that have divided the people in this country affect the Malays too. I don't think there is one set of issues for the non-Malays and one set for the Malays.

mahathir pak lah najib and anwarDo you think that when they attack Anwar Ibrahim personally, it doesn't upset the Malays? Of course it does. But can you talk about Anwar Ibrahim? You can't! Right from the days of Mahathir, we can't discuss about the things he had done.

The first thing that happened when Anwar came out of prison was for Umno supreme council to make the decision that Anwar would not be accepted back into Umno. That's all they think about. The leaders are worried but the ordinary rank-and-file probably want to understand a bit more.

The leaders think the members don't care and just want to follow. The members follow until a tipping point and then they just vote for the opposition or they would not go out and vote.

I'm hearing words from old Umno members saying "Aku meluat", "Agkuh" and "Sombong". These are some of the words being used, so Umno has to change. No more spin. We don't need spin doctors like Zam (Zainudin Maidin) anymore.

We need people who tell the truth. And if Umno can be a party of truth and a party which speaks for all Malaysians, especially the poor Malays then we have hope.

### **Does Umno have enough time to do it before the next elections?**

Of course, it has. They only need to be willing to do it. Four years is a long time. The opposition is not perfect anyway.

### **Do you foresee any contests for the top two posts in Umno this year?**

I don't foresee it but I hope I'm wrong though.

We've lived in contradiction in the last four years. Pak Lah speaks about integrity and this is the best time to show that by allowing for contests for the top positions.

If Pak Lah wins the elections then the moral authority goes to him automatically and his place will be more secure than ever. He can then sweep through a reform of Umno.

### **Is Abdullah a weak leader?**

Based on the last four years, yes. But on the day that he lost, he said, "I will change".

### **What are your thoughts on the rumour that Khairy Jamaluddin is behind BN's performance?**

I'm not sure about all the power play in Umno but I wish that his accusers will come out with specifics instead of making general statements. And then we can see if these allegations are true.

### **Do you believe in phantom voters in Kelantan and Terengganu?**

I don't think so. I can't see how you can have phantom voters. The problem we have now is the Elections Commission has no credibility. But that doesn't mean they are fixing things up. It's just that when the EC chief (Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman) speaks, he is provocative. He's like a Barisan Nasional fellow.

He likes to show that he is so loyal to Umno. He says things like "Nobody else can rule the country" and other ridiculous things like that. So when you talk like that, people don't trust you.

Especially when you are the EC chairman, you can't be political. Keep you it to yourself. Just do the job as a professional and stay away from politics. Cause when there is no trust in the leader, people start to imagine a lot of things. I think that is more the case then having phantom voters.

The other point is the way the political parties were helping voters go back to vote in Kelantan and Terengganu. You can help but you shouldn't be giving them money to vote for you as it is wrong. And when you do this in huge numbers, people get suspicious.

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