

Umno EGM : Tun Dr Mahathir backs Ku Li
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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he supported the call by veteran Umno leader Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah for an emergency general meeting for the party to discuss its electoral setback in the March 8 polls. MCPX

However, he denied endorsing Razaleigh in his bid for the Umno presidency.

When pressed if he would back Razaleigh for the post, he said: "If I endorse him for the president's position, others will want it too."

mahathir book event 210308 01As for the EGM, Mahathir said: "I was told that Razaleigh has written letters to all the Umno divisions asking for an EGM to discuss problems affecting Malays. I support that suggestion.

"The issue of selecting the next president should only be discussed after we have thrashed out our problems.

"This is because there might be other people who are interested in the position," he told reporters after attending a book launch in Kuala Lumpur.

"Furthermore, to challenge for the Umno presidency he needs support from delegates from 60 divisions. I don't see 60 divisions brave enough to back him."

tengku razaleigh 02It was reported on Wednesday that Razaleigh wants to contest for presidency.

In 2004, he tried to challenge Prime Minister and Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi but failed to obtain the necessary nominations. He received only one from his Gua Musang division.

Razaleigh had also previously challenged and narrowly lost to Mahathir in the 1987 party elections. This subsequently caused a split within the party with Razaleigh forming a splinter group, Semangat 46.

He was later invited back into the Umno fold by Mahathir in 1996 when he dissolved Semangat 46 and brought back all its members into Umno.

Razaleigh today found support on his call for an EGM from another unlikely source - party vice-president Muhyiddin Yassin - who said that he does not foresee any problems in holding one.

However, he said that the meeting must be held in accordance to the party's constitution.

"Please keep in mind that any action taken should not weaken the party, which will be an additional burden.

"If it is for the betterment of the party, we cannot stop it. Otherwise, rethink what the end result will be," he added.

Another split?

Meanwhile, on the issue of whether another tussle for the presidency might split the party again as it did in 1987 and 1999, Mahathir said this was not the case now.

"During my time as president and PM, Umno split twice," he admitted.

"Through these split-ups, Semangat 46 and PKR were born. Despite the break-ups, Umno regrouped and during the 2004 elections, we were very solid. BN won 90 percent of the seats and that meant that the voters did not support PKR."

Although splits are not good, sometimes debate is important for the party, he explained.

"Unfortunately, the current climate does not tolerate dissent or discussion. Members are now afraid to voice out, for fear of losing their positions in the government, division and even branch."

This, he said, was not the Umno way.

"From the time of Tunku (Abdul Rahman), Umno has always had a culture of disagreement. When the first president Onn (Jaafar) wanted to make Umno multi-racial, the members disagreed.

"And he withdrew. And when I created problems for Tunku, he withdrew and Umno remained solid."

So for a lack of voice, many Umno members voted for the opposition as a sign of protest, he said.

"It's not that they supported the opposition, but it's because they are against the leadership," said Mahathir.

Term limit for top post

To halt this, Mahathir suggested the establishment of a presidential committee within Umno to govern the president.

Otherwise, there would be too much power in a single person, he argued.

khairy abdullah badawi umno 200607The former leader was also receptive to the suggestion that Umno presidency should also be on a limited term.

But he said that doesn't mean that it can be passed on from father-in-law to son-in-law, in an obvious reference to Abdullah and Khairy Jamaluddin.

On the subject of buying over candidates by PKR, he said that this was a democratic country and both sides were at it.

"Both sides are trying to buy. That is very democratic. RM10 million is the going price," he said. "Just imagine, if you are a Yang Berhormat and you had RM10 million in the pocket.

That's very democratic," he said with his trademark sarcasm.

Mahathir was at Sri Carcosa to launch Malaysian Airports Holdings Bhd's late chairman Basir Ismail's second book "Management - Astray".

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