

MB crisis deepens in Terengganu
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Kijal assemblyperson Ahmad Said this morning officially received his appointment letter as the Terengganu menteri besar but a constitutional crisis looms as he was sacked from ruling party Umno. MCPX

The head of the Regency Advisory Council Raja Tengku Baderulzaman gave Ahmad his appointment letter in a ceremony at Istana Terengganu at 8.30am today. None of the other 22 BN state representatives were present at the ceremony.

ahmad said terengganu 230308However, Ahmad (left) has not been sworn in yet with the palace expected to fix Wednesday for that ceremony.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is also Umno president, said should Ahmad be sworn in as menteri besar, it would be "unconstitutional".

According to observers the swearing-in ceremony now looks remote after Umno sacked Ahmad from the party for disobeying party leadership.

The state's party leadership decided at a meeting last night to strip Ahmad of his membership after he defied the party by agreeing to take up the post.

Abdullah had backed Idris Jusoh, who had served as menteri besar in the last state administration, to remain in the post. Idris also had the support of all the 22 BN assemblypersons, excluding Ahmad.

A fallout with the sultan

However Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin of Terengganu - who is also the present king - preferred Ahmad to take over as the state's menteri besar. Idris is believed to have had a fallout with the sultan over several issues.

It is learnt that Ahmad also had the support of the grassroots Umno leaders and members. Sources say that he had the support of seven out of eight Umno divisions in Terengganu.

Yesterday the sultan's office announced that Ahmad, also the Kemaman Umno division chief, would be the new menteri besar, finally putting to an end to a 14-day wait for a person to be named for the post. Terengganu was the only state not to have a menteri besar after the March 8 polls.

idris jusoh and terengganuIn the general election, Idris-led BN retained the retained the state comfortably by winning 24 out of 32 state seats. PAS won the rest.

Immediately after the palace's announcement, the state Umno went into a frenzy as it has been rooting for the re-appointment of Idris, who is also the state Umno chief.

Twenty-two BN state representatives immediately announced that they were boycotting the swearing-in ceremony today to object to the appointment of Ahmad.

Federal Umno leadership also issued a warning to Ahmad not to accept the post, threatening to sack him from the party. That threat materialised last night when the state Umno leadership decided to act against the maverick assemblyperson.

Also this morning, state Umno secretary Rosol Wahid handed over to a palace official a letter signed by the 22 Umno assemblypersons protesting Ahmad's appointment. The letter also insisted that Idris should be sworn in as the rightful menteri besar.

Rosol also clarified that Ahmad's sacking - to be officially done by the party's disciplinary committee - will only become effective as soon as he participates in the swearing-in ceremony.

A snap poll soon?

Constitution expert Prof Abdul Aziz Bari pointed out the appointment of Ahmad, depending on the contents of the letter issued by the palace, was effective.

"The swearing in ceremony and all other rituals, in my opinion, are just there to clothe the decision of the palace," he told Malaysiakini.

"Meanwhile, all the other actions including the protests and intention to boycott the ceremony on Wednesday as well as the sacking of Ahmad from Umno would have no effect on the palace decision.

"Legally the palace decision still stands. But of course, the palace may revoke the appointment," he added.

He also said that the unhappy BN assemblypersons would have to wait for the first sitting of the assembly in order to pass a motion of no confidence against the party-less Ahmad.

"In such circumstance, the sultan or the regency council would then have to name another person who enjoys the support of the majority of the elected representatives or call for a snap state election," he said.

He said that although there would be no state government to request for a dissolution, the palace can still call for a state poll based on the sultan's reserve powers.

"This power is available in exceptional circumstances and may be resorted to in order to prevent chaos in the state.

"I believe the difficult situation in Terengganu now is one of the exceptional situations whereby the regency council would be justified in dissolving the house.

"Apparently this is one way to allow the people of Terengganu to have their say as to which party they prefer to be in government," he added.

He also said that there was also another precedent to this in Malaysia, going back to the situation in Kelantan in 1977.

"In Kelantan, the PAS assemblypersons - the majority in the house - passed a motion of no confidence against their own menteri besar Mohamed Nasir.

"As it happened however he refused to resign and this gave the federal government an opportunity to declare emergency on the state and eventually called a snap election - and won the state - in 1978," he added.

Idris to meet PM

Meanwhile, Idris was quoted in the RTM1 afternoon news as saying that he accepted the decision of the sultan.

"What can I do? If the palace wants Ahmad, then so be it," he said.

"I have the backing of the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, the state BN representatives and the people of Terengganu but the palace wants him," he said.

He added that he received telephone calls from both Abdullah and Najib Abdul Razak yesterday, assuring him that they fully supported his appointment.

He also said that he would be meeting prime minister at Putrajaya later today to discuss on what to do next.

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