

PM blames saboteurs for BN setback
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Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today blamed internal saboteurs for the party's horrendous showing in last month's general elections. MCPX

NONESpeaking to reporters after a closed-door briefing to about 1,000 party grassroots leaders at the Putra World Trade Centre this morning, Abdullah said that the acts of sabotage were the "main reason" for the party to suffer heavy losses.

He added that the saboteurs resulted in the party losing 14 parliament and 22 state seats - all previously declared safe seats by the party.

According to him, if the 22 state seats were retained, the party would not have lost Kedah and Perak to the opposition.

The Umno-led BN managed to win only 14 state seats in Kedah with the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition winning the remaining 22 to take control of the state.

Meanwhile in Perak, BN won 28 of the 59 state seats, again losing marginally to the opposition.

Similarly, Abdullah added that the 14 parliament seats would have also resulted in BN retaining its two-thirds in the Parliament. At present BN is eight seats short of attaining a two-thirds majority.

"Although there are other weaknesses within the party, the main reason we lost was due to acts of sabotage by Umno members," he said.

"In our analysis, there were at least 14 parliamentary and 22 state seats which we were guaranteed to win. But as a result of sabotage, we lost them."

Abdullah, who is also the prime minister, said that disciplinary action would be taken against the saboteurs. However, he declined to comment on their reasons for sabotaging the party.

No rejection from voters

NONEThe meeting today is widely seen as Abdullah's first step towards explaining Umno and Barisan Nasional's setback in the 2008 general election.

Umno division chiefs, wing leaders from the Wanita, Pemuda and Puteri and information heads formed the major segment of the attendees. Also present was Abdullah's deputy Najib Abdul Razak.

"We received very good support during the 2004 elections due to our manifesto which promised many good proposals. And there was high expectation and hope that we could do something about it," said Abdullah.

"I admit that the last four years, the government under my leadership have not been able to fully accomplish and implement all of the proposals."

The government has nevertheless brought many good changes to the economy, he said.

"For without a strong economy, we will not be able to implement other proposals."

He said that steps will continue to be taken to improve judicial integrity, racial harmony, police and public administration.

"Despite all this, the voters did not reject us and the opposition is not the government of the day. At the federal government level, we were eight seats short of two-thirds majority - a benchmark for success in Barisan Nasional," said Abdullah.

He also blamed former Umno vice-president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who has expressed his intention to oust him as president, for the party's inability to wrest Kelantan back from PAS.

Razaleigh, who is Kelantan's Gua Musang division chief, lambasted Abdullah's leadership when opening his division's extraordinary general meeting on Friday.

Abdullah strikes back at Dr M

Abdullah also came out swinging with both hands at today's press conference in response to attacks against him by his predecessor, Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He pointed out that it was Mahathir who clamped down on press freedom as well as launching the Operation Lalang mass crackdown against political dissidents in 1987.

NONE"Questions were also raised about the lack of freedom during my leadership and about me being lembik (soft). But if I'm a softie, why would there be a lack of freedom," said Abdullah.

"Some of these allegations are totally baseless. Were there not restrictions during his administration?" he asked.

"I know that reporters were told (after Mahathir had taken over) that pictures and stories of (former premier) Tun Hussein Onn cannot be carried anymore.

"(And) who's responsible for Operation Lalang? There are already enough bloggers and opinions given on who was responsible for those events and I don't need to add more," he said.

He added that he cannot accept a party split at this time and has asked the members to back him so that he can accomplish his tasks for the good of the country.

On Mahathir's stinging attacks lately, Abdullah returned fire by accusing his former boss of abusing his position.

"When we won 92 percent in 2004, he said this (lack of opposition) is not good. Did he tolerate opposition during his reign?"

"When the opposition has grown stronger, he now directs his attack at us. Menang banyak tak boleh, menang sikit pun tak boleh. Apa yang boleh? (Win handsomely, he complains, win less, also he complains. What to do?)," said Abdullah.

On whether action will be taken to investigate his predecessor for his role in the 1987 judiciary crisis and other matters, the prime minister said that it depended on the proof.

"As far as this government is concerned, our stand is if there is proof, the agencies can go ahead and charge anyone."

Action against saboteurs

NONEDuring the press conference, Umno information supreme Muhammad Muhd Taib was asked when action would be taken against the saboteurs.

He answered that it would be "after the disciplinary committee has investigated the matter".

Delegates who attended the briefing told Malaysiakini that the two-hour party briefing however did not include a question-and-answer session despite that it was on the agenda.

"Although microphones were there but when it came to the Q&A portion, Muhd Taib said that Abdullah's clarification was very good and asked if the Q&A session could be scrapped," said the grassroots leader.

"Although some disagreed, after a quick show of hands, he quickly announced that the majority of the members did not want to ask questions. And that was the end of it."

Similarly, questions posed to Muhd Taib on the recent calls for the abolition of Umno quota system as well as the demand for an extraordinary general meeting to discuss the polls setback were quickly dismissed.

According to Muhd Taib, you don't change the rules while in the middle of a football game.

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