

Roadshows to push for PM's resignation
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Veteran and grassroots Umno leaders are seeking to hold state-by-state roadshows and gatherings to press party president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to step down, said an Umno branch leader today. MCPX

Saifuddin Herman, Umno Pusat Bandar Taman Cempaka branch chairperson, Syed Saifuddin Syed Herman (right) said this idea was mooted and agreed upon after discussions with former Kedah menteri besar Sanusi Junid and several other Umno leaders from Selangor and the Federal Territory.

"I expressed this (idea to) Sanusi and (former Selangor exco member) Fuad Hassan (and) that we need to do something at a bigger level to sustain the momentum (achieved)," he told Malaysiakini when met in Kuala Lumpur.

"We fully agreed that this thing be done at the state-by-state level," he added.

Saifuddin's branch organised the forum held yesterday where former Umno president and ex-premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad spoke on the need for Abdullah to step down in order to save Umno.

According to Saifuddin, about 1,100 people bought tickets to the event held at a hotel in Jalan Ampang to hear Mahathir speak as well as to air their own views on the leadership crisis facing the party. However, an estimated crowd of 500 turned up for the forum.

Among the guests was Ummi Hafilda Ali - the woman at the centre of the former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim's corruption trial eight years ago.

She called for a 100,000 gathering in Putrajaya to demand Abdullah's resignation - a suggestion which received some support among the audience.

Saifuddin said those who attended yesterday's forum blamed the current leadership for BN's dismal performance at the March 8 general election due to its indifference to views at the grassroots level.

Many more Umno leaders - especially at the division level and above - agree with the need for the leadership to change to save it from dying off, said Saifuddin.

However, these division chiefs and other top leaders are concerned that being seen at such events will jeopardise their positions and interests.

This has prevented them from attending or showing their support openly for Abdullah to step down, lamented Saifuddin.

Therefore, his group will be bringing the 'PM resign now' message directly to Umno branches, which are smaller units under the party divisions.

Don't blame saboteurs

Saifuddin hoped the roadshow would attract even more people to the cause.

"The crowds will be bigger (at these roadshows) to support this appeal (for Abdullah to consider resigning)," he said.

According to him, Umno branch leaders from the Ampang and Gombak divisions in Selangor and Titiwangsa in the Federal Territory approached him after yesterday's forum to discuss how more of such talks can be organised.

He also said he received many short-messaging-system texts and calls on his mobile phone congratulating him for the good turnout and the outcome of the forum.

The details of the roadshows, such as when and where it will begin, have yet to be discussed, said Saifuddin.

NONECommenting on Abdullah's statement yesterday that Barisan Nasional's poor showing at the March 8 general election was due to saboteurs within Umno, Saifuddin said this demonstrated his inability to admit his own faults.

"He has blamed (former Umno vice-president) Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Mahathir and the opposition and everybody else, but he has not placed any of the blame on himself.

"Abdullah must face the reality that he is the problem, especially his poor leadership. The problem is also shared by his son-in-law (Umno Youth deputy chief Khairy Jamaluddin)," he said.

Internal manipulation

Asked why Umno grassroots members do not wait for the party's annual general meeting (AGM) set to take place in December to vote Abdullah out of power, Saifuddin said they do not trust that the party's nominations and elections process.

These, he said, could be manipulated to keep Abdullah's contenders from mounting an effective challenge.

He cited the example of the Kubang Pasu division elections in 2006 which saw Mahathir, who was contesting to represent the division at the year's AGM, failing to secure one of seven positions.

Several quarters have expressed the suspicion that corruption prevented Mahathir from being securing enough votes.

"Look at what happened in Kubang Pasu. You mean to tell me that a former Umno president, an ex-prime minister, who has done so much for the people of Kubang Pasu and led BN to five victories in Kedah, was not popular enough to be a delegate to the AGM?

"There is no guarantee that the same thing will not happen again in December," said Saifuddin.

"We are appealing - we are not forcing - Abdullah to resign for the sake of the future of Umno. It is not that we do not love Abdullah. It's just that we love Umno more," he added.

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