

All past Umno leaders quit party except one
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Umno information chief Muhammad Muhd Taib has urged members to stay true to the party in the wake of the mass resignation call from former leader Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who gave up his life membership on Monday.

mat taibHe described the Malay-based party as an "ark" that had sailed the seas in face of numerous tempests and typhoons.

"I wish to advise Umno members throughout the country to continue remain in Umno because to us, Umno is our ark ... which has been sailing for a long time.

"In order for it to face any tempest or typhoon, it must be strong. If it is weak, the government will be weak," he told a press conference at Parliament yesterday.

While calling for Umno members to stay the course, he also pointed out that the party's tumultuous history shows Umno members had remained dedicated to the party despite the resignation of many of its past leaders.

mahathir and umno 190508 02Citing the example of its past presidents - Onn Jaffar, Tunku Abdul Rahman and Hussein Onn - Muhammad said Mahathir was the fourth party president to have quit the party. The only one who did not quit Umno was Abdul Razak, who died in office.

"Almost all Umno leaders left Umno at one point. The irony is, then and now, Umno members stayed with Umno. They continued supporting their imam and leader. This is the right act and proper action."

He conceded, however, that there had never been a former Umno president who had called for his hand-picked successor to step down until Mahathir.

Onn Jaffar, who was founding member of Umno and the party's first president, quit Umno in 1951 to unsuccessfully set up a multiracial party.

Later both Abdul Rahman and Hussein Onn resigned from the party after Umno split into two - Mahathir's Umno Baru and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's Semangat 46.

After the attempts by the two former leaders to form Umno Malaysia failed - whose registration was quashed by Mahathir - the duo backed Razaleigh.

Mat Taib: Let the them meet

Muhammad also welcomed the idea of a meeting between Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Mahathir to resolve their differences.

Mahathir previously had a four-eye meeting with Abdullah two years ago, but it did not stop the feud between the two.

The rural and regional development minister also chastised Mahathir's son Mukhriz, who yesterday said he was staying put in the party but nevertheless called on Abdullah to step down as Umno president and prime minister.

"I think the leadership of Umno should be decided by Umno members. We have our ways within the party. We have elections. Let the processes run as normal. No party, outside or within Umno, should make such a call (for Abdullah to step down).

"This is not Umno culture. In Umno culture, there are ways and process. There are division meetings and there are branch meetings. There are Umno AGMs (annual general meetings). That's the way."

hishammuddin hussein pc 030408 03Meanwhile, Umno Youth chief Hishammuddin Hussein - the grandson of Onn Jaafar - said it is unfortunate that while many youth leaders were seeking to meet the challenges facing the party and government, there were those who were hindering them from moving on.

"Every time we want to move forward, all kinds of hindrances are place in front of us. But I am not giving up. I've never looked back," said the education minister.

"We have been tested before and we have passed (the tests) and held to our principles. Everybody has their own views, including Mahathir, but he cannot stop us, the youth and youth leaders, from moving forward," he added.

Saying he had met Mukhriz and his deputy Khairy Jamaluddin, Hishammuddin added that he had inculcated into his Umno Youth leaders to put the party above individual interests.

He was confident that there would be no leadership change despite the pressures being brought to bear upon the party.

Rais: Examine why Mahathir resigned

On the other hand, Umno supreme council member Rais Yatim appeared to be more conciliatory - he said the party must look seriously at how it can regain its strength and at the same time address the reasons which led to Mahathir's sudden resignation.

suhakam religion culture conference 090906 rais yatim speakWhile declining to speculate as to whether there would be Umno members who would follow Mahathir's lead and quit the party, Rais however said there should not be anyone "pretending to be champions while uttering extreme comments".

"Veterans and youth (members) need to cool their thoughts and not pretend to be champions... Don't make extreme comments, because each quarter has their followers.

"In politics, anything can happen, so don't make comments and statements that will be of detriment to Malays and Umno," said Rais.

Umno veteran Razaleigh said Mahathir's influence extends beyond the party as well as the country but he was ambivalent on whether the former president's resignation would lead many to quit the party.

The problem with Umno members is that many of them are " beholden " to certain party

leaders instead of being committed to the struggle of the party, said Razaleigh.

“Some of them are beholden to the party leadership because of favours and the patronage exercised by the leadership. It is very difficult for them to tear away from it,” he lamented.

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