

**Ku Li's campaign gains momentum**  
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When party veteran Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah announced MCPX his decision to challenge yet again the Umno presidency on March 19, not many took him seriously.

After all, this would be the third time in his 49-year political career that he would be reprise the role of the challenger.

tengku razaleigh umno roadshow 160608 11Unlike his epic battle against Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1987 which saw him losing by a mere 43 votes, Tengku Razaleigh, warmly known as Ku Li (extreme right), is today said to be no longer a credible threat any more.

Following his loss to Mahathir, he left the party to form Semangat 46 but returned into Umno's fold in 1996.

By then, he had missed out on 10 years of Umno politics despite holding firmly on to his Gua Musang parliamentary seat. Still, he lacks strong allies within the younger set of Umno leaders and has no power bases outside of Kelantan. Being 71 years old, most view him as an irritant at best.

Even Mahathir sees him only as a hopeful dreamer at most when asked on his move to go for the party presidency once again.

"To challenge the presidency, he needs support from the delegates of 60 divisions. I don't see 60 divisions brave enough to back him," said Mahathir.

When Ku Li attempted to challenge prime minister and Umno President Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2006, he only obtained one nomination from - unsurprisingly - Gua Musang.

tengku razaleigh umno roadshow 160608 05Yet, after following him for over 1,130 kilometres across three states in 48 hours, one senses a growing momentum building for Ku Li among Umno members.

This could be seen as his entourage visited Tanah Merah, Jeli, Gua Musang, Machang, Kota Baru, Pengkalan Chepa, Bachok, Kubang Kerian, Tumpat, Rantau Panjang, Pasir Mas and Pasir Puteh.

**Leaders pressured to stay away**

Leaving aside grassroots members and division leaders for the moment, Ku Li's strategy to garner enough nominations involves turning to branch leaders who will vote during the party's divisional annual general meetings in October.

One of his political aides, John Pang, made this careful observation: "There is a bottleneck at the divisional level. When we first set out, many division leaders were either pressured or advised not to attend his talks or support his ideas.

"Even those who said they would (call for emergency meetings to discuss Umno's predicament) later changed their minds and refused to act. As such, we've had to move further downwards to convince branch leaders of the need for change," he explained.

"Besides, it is much harder for any hanky-panky to take place when it involves so many branch leaders."

tengku razaleigh umno roadshow 160608 06This, however, is no easy task as each division consists of many branches. The Marang division alone is said to have 100 branches while the slightly bigger Hulu Terengganu division carries 140. Umno has 191 divisions throughout Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah.

While Ku Li's entourage does not go from house-to-house, its Tupperware party-like style has the numbers slowly but steadily increasing.

While only 50 people turned up in Kuala Krai, more than 700 attended his talk in Mentakab on Saturday. At Marang, Kuala Berang and Kuala Terengganu, batches of 50 to 500 branch leaders came out to listen to him.

Branch leader Rozi Mukhtar said that he will take Ku Li's message to those who did not come.

"I will form a committee to brief the other branch leaders and garner support for him," said Rozi.

Coincidentally, Abdullah visited Kelantan and Terengganu a day after Tengku Razaleigh left. In Kelantan on Friday, Umno state chief Anuar Musa announced in the media that they were fully behind the premier for the Umno presidency despite Ku Li being a Kelantanese.

Then three hours after Ku Li had addressed a crowd of 300 on the issue of Terengganu's oil royalties payment being taken away by the federal government, Abdullah announced that the management of the monies would be given back to the state authorities.

tengku razaleigh umno roadshow 160608 02In Terengganu, the question of this wang ehsan (oil royalties) and what had happened to it had dominated Ku Li's meetings. Questions revolving the Islamic Civilisation Park and how little it benefitted Terengganu's citizens were also raised.

Elsewhere, the incumbent party president's inept leadership, Barisan Nasional's awful performance in the last general elections and Abdullah's handling of the fuel price increases were the main flavour.

### **An economics guru**

One mainstay, however, was Tengku Razaleigh's take on the nominations he needed in order to fulfill the quota to run for Umno president.

Calling the quota unfair, the Kelantan royal house prince's explanation that it was the product of 'cowardly' leaders bereft of ideas struck a chord among the branch leaders.

One branch veteran in Kuala Terengganu reasoned with his peers: "Umno today is no longer

what it used to be. Everything revolves around one man and democracy has died in this party.

"While they (leaders) tell us not to contest for the top two posts, they encourage us to fight to the death at the bottom (from the supreme council level to the branch level).

tengku razaleigh umno roadshow 160608 08"During the elections, we work our hearts out to put them in the leadership but once they are there, they forget about us. One branch leader who wanted to meet an Umno minister had to wait seven years."

Till now, he has still not met the minister, revealed the branch leader.

"Their (the top leaders') membership fee is RM1, so is ours. Why should our RM1 not be allowed to decide the party leadership?" he questioned.

Listening to Tengku Razaleigh during his tour, one wonders if he were indeed a politician with 49 years experience.

At times, he seemed more like an economics guru explaining the workings behind the government's petrol price hike and why it was necessary rather than a man working to unseat his political rival.

There was none of the hard-hitting opportunistic rhetoric used before to attack Abdullah. In place of that, he merely explained the rationale behind the government's intentions before telling the crowd how differently he would have handled the situation.

Wherever he went with his 'band of merry men' (mostly old friends and a few supporters) there were no pretences and most of the meetings were conducted in simple venues devoid of fanfare.

The only two times where there was some indication that a prince had arrived was at Kuala Berang where the organisers brought in a primary school kompong troupe and similarly at a petrol price hike talk at Kuala Terengganu which was also attended by former chief judge Salleh Abas.

### **Last thing we need**

When questions were posed, Ku Li took his time to explain the reason for his actions without resorting to political rhetoric.

The only time he avoided a question was when he was asked on what kind of measures he would take to rid Umno of its dependency culture and patronism.

"The measures I intend to take to make Malays less dependent on patronism will be harsh and difficult. But I can't tell you now as you then would not support me," Ku Li told the branch leader who posed the question.

Listening to Ku Li talk on issues of transparency, wiping out of money politics, accountability, protection of Malay interests, economics, education etc, the question arises if he is the right man for the country's top job.

Feedback from those who attended his ceramah in the three states also gives rise to the

perception as to whether the branch leaders targeted have the courage to go against the party top leadership's wish that there be a 'no contest' for the top post.

The issue, however, goes beyond Tengku Razaleigh. The heart of it lies in returning democracy to Umno and, in turn, to the nation. As the prince correctly points out, "There is nothing in Umno's constitution which says that the president must hand over his job to his deputy.

tengku razaleigh umno roadshow 160608 10"The position of Umno president and prime minister of Malaysia is not the ownership of just these two men. It belongs to everyone."

And for that alone, the Umno rank and file should help him overcome the status quo and send him to the party's December polls with enough nominations to become a legitimate candidate.

Once there, let the voice of the delegates (at least) decide on who should lead the party and country - not leave it to the wisdom of the current president alone.

For the last thing we need now is another former prime minister whining and regretting his decision to hand over his job to his deputy.

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