

'Mahathirism' will hasten Umno's demise
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Outgoing Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today expressed sadness that certain quarters in the party believe that reverting to the old order is the panacea to revive the ailing institution.

"Sadly there are still those who feel that we do not need to pursue reforms," he said in his opening speech at the 59th Umno general assembly in Kuala Lumpur.

"They believe that Umno will regain its glory if we revert to the old ways - the old order, by restricting freedom of our citizens and by silencing their criticisms," he added.

Abdullah's remarks come amidst growing concerns that his successor Najib Abdul Razak would emulate the leadership traits of former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad and come down hard on critics.

There is also widespread fear that the Internal Security Act (ISA) will be invoked to quash dissent.

Abdullah said these quarters are of the view that Umno can continue to be in power if they safeguard the interests of certain individuals and give in to the demands of certain groups.

"There are those among us who gain comfort from these thoughts and are still lulled into a false sense of security," he added.

According to Abdullah, the old path is the wrong path.

"If we revert to the old path, I believe we are choosing the wrong path, one that will take us to regression and decay. It is the path that I fear will hasten our demise," he said.

"If we do not take courageous steps to reform in the face of dynamic transformation of society and the radical changes taking place, then we shall live to witness the end of our beloved Umno.

"What is the point of fighting tooth and nail for positions in the party if all that remains of us is an obsolete husk," he added.

'Chip off the old block'

Under Mahathir's 22-year reign, Malaysia was often criticised of lacking democratic space and accused of employing draconian measures to silence dissent.

In 1987, the Mahathir administration launched a massive ISA dragnet, codenamed 'Ops Lalang', which netted more than 100 people, including opposition politicians and activists.

Despite his retirement in 2003, Mahathir continued to play a pivotal role in national politics, often criticising his handpicked successor Abdullah whom he blamed for weakening Umno and Barisan Nasional.

He had also repeatedly called on the premier to resign and hand over the reins to Najib, whom many regard as being a 'chip off the old block'.

Since assuming the premiership, Abdullah's administration adopted a more liberal approach compared to his predecessor. However, despite making several grand promises such as eradicating corruption and reforming the judiciary, Abdullah was seen as falling short of his pledges.

The pressure increased and the chorus calling for Abdullah's head to roll grew louder after BN suffered a major setback in the March 8 general election, where the ruling coalition lost several states and was denied a two-third majority in Parliament for the first time in history.

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