

Reform of Umno doubtful, says sacked ex-minister
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Beh Lih Yi

Sacked Umno member and former de facto law minister Zaid Ibrahim is doubtful if the ruling party is capable of reform as pledged following its dismal showing in the March 8 polls.

Zaid, who was given the boot on Tuesday for having close ties with the opposition, lamented that some leaders in Umno could not accept his open-minded approaches and views.

At a press conference in Petaling Jaya today, the former minister was asked if Umno is capable of reforms, to which he replied: "I doubt they (the leaders) can.

"But Umno will have a new leader in March... I may be wrong," he added in reference to the transition of power plan which will see Najib Abdul Razak succeeding Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as number one.

On the same note, Zaid stressed that his sacking underscored the fact that Umno leaders are not open to the ideas of change which he has advocated.

"The criticism against me was because they cannot accept these ideas of change. (Otherwise) why are they so angry with me? What have I done? They can't accept these changes," he said.

Among others, he said, certain party leaders could not accept his stand on wanting to make the Malays more independent.

These party leaders, he added, considered such a view as a 'betrayal' of the Malay race.

'Stop belittling me'

Although he did not name the leaders, Zaid, when responding to another question, called on Umno vice-president Muhyiddin Yassin, information chief Muhammad Muhd Taib and supreme council member Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz to stop "belittling" him.

"Umno leaders like Nazri, Muhyiddin, Mat Taib (Muhammad) and others always made fun of me and said all sort of things. I think they should concentrate on doing their work and resolve the country's problems.

"Like they said, since I am a nobody, there is no need for them to belittle me all the time, focus on your work," he added.

Zaid said his attempt to articulate a new vision for the party which was less communal had been misconstrued as being 'rebellious'.

He also warned that if Umno did not adopt a more inclusive approach, race relations in this country would be further affected.

"Umno has become more ethno-centric, more communitarian but that is not our role. Umno's role is to be the provider for everyone [...] that is where we differ," he said.

'Pak Lah a nice man'

Zaid also disagreed when asked if his sacking was a move by Abdullah to boost his popularity in the party.

abdullah ahmad badawi pak lah pc 050908 04"No, I think Pak Lah is a nice man. He wouldn't sack me on his own [...] but then Pak Lah couldn't even maintain himself..." he said.

Zaid's resignation from his ministerial post in September and his sacking this week render a blow to the Abdullah administration.

The 58-year-old politician had left a successful legal practice to serve in Abdullah's government in March and his appointment was lauded as a sign of the premier's resolution to push for reforms.

Zaid was entrusted with the task of reforming the judiciary, one of the major areas of reform promised by Abdullah.

Nevertheless, Zaid travelled on a bumpy road during his short tenure in government. He was faced with internal criticism on several counts such as the setting up of the judicial appointment commission and the issue of apologising to six affected judges in the 1988 judicial crisis.

He finally resigned in protest over the use of the Internal Security Act, which allows for detention without trial, against an opposition politician, a blogger and a journalist.

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