

I never had any issues with Umno or Zahid, says Ismail Sabri

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob has reiterated that he is a party man and never had problems with Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

He said when he was the deputy prime minister and later prime minister, he greatly respected Ahmad Zahid and tried his best to maintain a good relationship with him when the latter was not in the Federal Government.

Despite this, Ismail Sabri said narratives still persisted about the existence of a "Putrajaya cluster" and a "PWTC cluster" that he claimed were simply created to disrupt unity in Umno.

"Actually, I don't have issues with Umno or with Datuk Seri Zahid as Umno president; I have no problems with him, and I respect him. He is the party president, and, as the vice-president, I must respect him," Ismail Sabri said during an interview in the *Keluar Sekajap* podcast.

He said he tried his best to show his deep respect for the party president during meetings.

"When I was defence minister, deputy prime minister and prime minister, I had bodyguards from the Special Action Unit.

"But out of respect, I never requested these escorts when I attended Umno supreme council meetings," he added.

He said he never asked to be dropped off at Level Four of the main entrance of Umno headquarters in Kuala Lumpur for fear of hurting Ahmad Zahid's feelings.

"I would park at level three and go up. The police escorts would turn off their sirens. I asked for this as I respected my president.

"If I wanted to meet him (Ahmad Zahid), as prime minister, I could have asked him to come to my (Prime Minister's) office in Putrajaya.

"But instead, I went to Yayasan Akal Budi in Country Heights, Kajang. When we arrived there, I asked my police escorts to turn off all the police sirens and lights.

"The police would back away and only my car with me inside would enter the place because I respect the party president," the Bera MP said in the podcast.

Ismail Sabri, who was appointed prime minister in August 2021, also recalled his feelings when he did not receive support from his own party while he led the government.

"At that time, those who did not support me were from my own party, Umno leaders who did not support me.

"The Opposition members all supported me, they signed an MOU in support and they didn't disturb me.

"PKR and others were okay

with me; the ones who weren't okay were those within Umno.

"But for me, things were the same between myself and Umno whether I was a senior minister, deputy prime minister or prime minister," Ismail Sabri added.

He said there were no differences in the narrative between ministers or Putrajaya and Umno.

"We adhered to what the party asked us to do.

"If I wanted to go against Umno, I wouldn't have cared when the party asked me to dissolve Parliament (for the general election).

"I asked for a dissolution of Parliament because the party wanted me to. I'm a party man," he said.