

Winning GE13 is Job No. 1, Umno men say after Dr M's putsch warning
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 25 — Winning Election 2013 takes precedence over party intrigues, several Umno leaders said today as they sought to play down veteran Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's warning to Datuk Seri Najib Razak that the prime minister may lose his post if the ruling coalition cedes more seats in the next polls.

Seasoned Umno lawmakers contacted by The Malaysian Insider appeared upset that the country's fourth and longest-serving prime minister had chosen to publicly remind Najib about what he stood to lose with the 13th general election just weeks away, but did not deny that party warlords may push for the sixth PM to be ousted should the Barisan Nasional (BN) suffer further setbacks.

"No one should not talk about things like that, [not] even Tun. Such statements will do more harm than good. I disagree with him. We should be focusing on winning now," said Umno supreme council member Dr Mohd Khir Toyo.

"What Tun raised is, of course, important, but we can wait for the results of the elections first. We can talk about that later," the former Selangor menteri besar said.

Dr Mahathir was yesterday reported by international news agency AFP as suggesting that Najib may be unseated by unhappy Umno warlords if he fails to improve on BN's performance during Election 2008, which had also helped unite the disparate opposition parties into a cohesive political force.

Dr Mahathir also told the news wire that he was worried about a possible regime change, suggesting there would be chaos and religious strife if the BN lost Putrajaya.

"Of course, if he (Najib) does not perform, there will be some necessity to switch horses.

"There could be a lot of disappointment and maybe a move to challenge him. That is normal," the ex-prime minister who was in office for 22 years was quoted saying.

Pulai MP Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed, also said Dr Mahathir should not have aired Umno's dirty laundry with the election just weeks away.

But the son of one of Dr Mahathir's staunchest supporters, the late Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, suggested the 87-year-old was only seeking to protect his legacy by campaigning for a BN win.

"Tun shouldn't be talking about something negative at this point... I suppose he wants his legacy to continue by making sure BN wins.

"We can win actually (but) we need continuity to ensure BN can continue with its transformation and rejuvenation of its ministers and mentris besar," Nur Jazlan told The Malaysian Insider.

Dr Mahathir was credited as the political force behind successor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's premature retirement from office in April 2009 — despite winning the 12th general

elections albeit with the loss of its parliamentary supermajority — and paving the way for Najib's rise to the top.

Previously, Dr Mahathir had repeatedly warned the country's majority Malays that a weak government like Najib's would give rise to non-Malay dominance, alluding to the liberal policies pushed by Najib and reading them as signs of growing non-Malay encroachment into Malay rights.

But the former prime minister had also called on voters to give Najib a chance, saying restoring BN's parliamentary supermajority would help the Umno-led federal government consolidate the Malays' position in the country.

But for some Umno members, Dr Mahathir's statements could undo Najib's vigorous push to maintain the party's Malay powerbase and court the critical young — seen to be the new kingmakers, according to the results of several surveys conducted in the past few months in the run-up to Election 2013.

"I am not saying he is wrong. I respect him. He is my former boss. But I believe we should be focusing on winning now. I would prefer to stick with positive things for now. Let's support Najib," said Padang Besar MP Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid, a former Umno supreme council member and an ex-minister.

Some political analysts have forecasted that BN will retain federal power at the polls that must be called by end-April when the current BN mandate expires, but have said that any win will be slim and unlikely to give it the customary two-thirds majority it enjoyed before Election 2008.

Other pundits, however, believe an opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) win at the polls may be possible, ushering a new regime into power for the first time since Independence in 1957.

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