

PKR rebel Zahrain rewarded with plum job as envoy to Indonesia
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Former Penang PKR leader Datuk Seri Mohamed Zahrain Hashim (pic) is to be named as the next Malaysian ambassador to Indonesia in what is seen as a reward for supporting Barisan Nasional (BN) in Election 2013.

Sources told The Malaysian Insider that Datuk Seri Najib Razak is rewarding him with the plum diplomatic posting, much to the chagrin of career diplomats who say relations with Jakarta must be handled delicately.

"Zahrain is getting the ambassador's job in Jakarta," a source told The Malaysian Insider.

Another source said an announcement will be made in due time.

Zahrain became Bayan Baru MP in Election 2008 but quit PKR in February 2010 after Pakatan Rakyat (PR) component party DAP criticised him for speaking out against Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng.

A month earlier in January 2010, Zahrain attacked Lim as being a "dictator, a chauvinist and communist-minded", citing what he saw as a failure by Lim to deliver on his election promises.

Once a close friend of PKR de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Zahrain formed Konsensus Bebas with other PKR turncoats who later supported BN.

After leaving PKR, Zahrain was also heavily featured on Umno-controlled private television station TV3 where he hit out at PR and criticised Anwar on various issues.

But Zahrain did not contest in the May 5 general election where BN only won 133 federal seats, down seven from the 140 won in Election 2008.

The Malaysian Insider understands the posting to Jakarta is a political move to shore up support for BN among Indonesian politicians who are seen to be close to Anwar.

Anwar is a regular visitor to Jakarta, where some of his aides fled after he was sacked as deputy prime minister in 1998.

Jakarta has also recently entered the spotlight as the venue for peace overtures between Najib and Anwar with former Indonesian vice-president Jusuf Kalla named as the middle-man between both sides before and after Election 2013.

It is understood that Indonesia takes a keen interest in Malaysian politics as some two million of its citizens work in Malaysia as house maids, and plantation and construction workers.

Tension between both neighbours over the abuse of maids and illegal immigrants in detention camps led to Jakarta leaving its ambassador's post in Kuala Lumpur vacant for at least 18 months until early this year.

The current Malaysian envoy to Indonesia is Datuk Syed Munshe Afdzaruddin Syed Hassan, who was posted there in January 2010 after his stint as ambassador to Iran.

Syed Munshe has been widely described as Wisma Putra's most experienced "Indonesian hand" as this was his third stint in the country. - September 5, 2013

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