

Mukhriz's bid will be a barometer of Dr Mahathir's influence in Umno
Malaysian Insider
Sept 20 , 2013
NEWS ANALYSIS BY THE MALAYSIAN INSIDER

Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir's (pic) successful stab at becoming an Umno vice-president, and a future deputy prime minister and prime minister of Malaysia will come down to one question: whether his father still has clout in Umno?

The decision of the Kedah Menteri Besar to contest for one of the three vice-president's positions caught Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak by surprise, with the latter wondering what prompted Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's youngest son to step up a month before the party polls.

Najib told Mukhriz that he was free to challenge incumbents Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein and Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal to become a vice-president of Umno but cautioned that it was a risky gambit, sources told The Malaysian Insider.

The reason: the incumbents declared their intent to defend their positions early and have been working the ground feverishly. Plus, they have been in positions of power in Umno far longer than Mukhriz and have the resources of the ministeries they head to impress party delegates. And Zahid-Shafie-Hishammuddin appear to be working as a pact.

Left unsaid is the fact that Najib would prefer the incumbents to be returned unopposed or at least, with minimum fuss, believing that the Zahid, Shafie and Hishammuddin trio will provide protection against any move to oust him.

Even though by convention the party president does not state openly who he wants as the vice-presidents, in practice, the preferred list of the number one is always made clear to all delegates.

But within the Mukhriz camp, there is a quiet confidence that he can at least deny Hishammuddin and become the third vice-president, a promotion that would put him in the frame for the deputy prime minister position by the time the next general election is called.

The confidence stems from his father's influence in Umno. On his own, Mukhriz will flounder. He may have some residual support from his years as an Umno Youth leader but the dynamics in the youth wing has changed since his defeat to Khairy Jamaluddin in the last party polls.

Since then, Khairy has become a full minister and is in a position to leverage on his Cabinet position and the power of incumbency to dictate the voting pattern in Umno Youth. And it is clear that despite Khairy's reservations about his former chum Hishammuddin (the cause for the antipathy: a member of Hishammuddin's inner circle tried to persuade Mukhriz to challenge for the Umno Youth leader's post), Tun Abdullah Badawi's son-in-law still prefers the Defence Minister over Mukhriz, the son of his long time critic.

Mukhriz will also be hoping to ride on any wave of discontent in Umno over Najib's performance in GE13. Truth be told, party officials are still unsure if a Najib-led BN will be able to improve on the 133 parliamentary seats his team won on May 5. If this mood is whipped up, then Najib's chosen few could face a backlash on October 19.

Agitator-in-chief in Umno Baru. The party polls in December will show if the former prime minister, who quit from the party in 2008, still has clout. - September 20, 2013. Agitator-in-chief in Umno Baru. The party polls in December will show if the former prime minister, who quit from the party in 2008, still has clout. - September 20, 2013. And this is where Dr Mahathir, agitator-in-chief, comes in.

The former prime minister has already started talking about the need for a new crop of leaders to be allowed to move up the ranks in Umno, warning that the ruling party will atrophy and die without rejuvenation.

That is a polite way of saying that some incumbents should step aside. Now.

He is likely to increase the intensity of attacks and observations and will be aided by Utusan Malaysia, bloggers aligned to him, Ibrahim Ali and others who believe that Mukhriz's ascent will bring a return to Mahathirism.

Dr Mahathir still has a following in the party, with many looking with some nostalgia for the uncomplicated scenario of his years in power, with the two-thirds control of Parliament and less threatening opposition pretty much the norm.

Within the Umno ranks, some of them want his decisiveness and tough approach against government critics, the same combination that makes Home Minister Zahid Hamidi a sure bet for the vice-president's position.

But some Umno insiders said that Dr Mahathir's influence in the party is overstated and point to the fact he did not make much of an impact in the constituencies where he campaigned during GE13, notably Gelang Patah, Shah Alam, Lumut, Pasir Mas.

His critics added that BN's win in Kedah owed more to the disastrous performance of Menteri Besar Datuk Azizan Abdul Razak than to Dr Mahathir's intervention.

So for the former strongman of Malaysian politics, his son's decision to challenge for one of the three vice-president's positions could also be a defining moment for him.

Once and for all, he will find out whether he actually has the power to affect decisions in Umno. Or whether his time has come and gone.

For Mukhriz to have any chance to shine against the likes of Zahid, Shafie, Hishammuddin or even Datuk Seri Ali Rustam and Tan Sri Isa Samad, it has to be the former. - September 20, 2013.

Hakcipta © 2013 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/mukhrizs-bid-will-be-a-barometer-of-dr-ms-influence-in-umno>

