

Najib's credibility dented further with Terengganu crisis, say analysts
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BY EILEEN NG

With charges of being weak still ringing in his ears, Datuk Seri Najib Razak's (pic) credibility has taken a further beating with the Terengganu crisis, say analysts.

However, they pointed out the Umno president should not be solely blamed for how the fiasco has spiralled out of control, a week after marking one year of winning his first personal mandate in Election 2013.

They say that Datuk Seri Ahmad Said – the rogue former Terengganu menteri besar and the first Umno assemblyman to turn independent – should shoulder equal responsibility for a dismal performance, while knowing his tenure had a limited shelf life.

"This will have a tremendous negative impact on Najib's credibility within Umno. Will it weaken Najib's leadership? Yes. Should it? No, because both Najib and Ahmad Said are equally responsible.

"This is not purely Najib's fault," Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) chief executive Wan Saiful Wan Jan told The Malaysian Insider.

He said Umno members would blame the prime minister for this fiasco although there are strong reasons for Ahmad Said to go. Najib was said to have met the Umno assemblymen from Terengganu last night in crisis talks over Ahmad's resignation from the party.

The former menteri besar was widely acknowledged as a poor performer. In fact, his 15-day working visit to the Antarctica earlier this year did not sit well with his Umno and Barisan Nasional colleagues.

"The way this matter was handled backfired in a very bad way. I suspect Najib had tried to handle it better but there must be some serious miscalculations by Umno that led to this.

"I hope Umno members can see that the action to remove Ahmad Said was not a wrong decision," says Wan Saiful, adding that any moves from within the party to dislodge Najib from the top post is unlikely as no one is willing to step up to the plate.

For Dr Jayum Jawan, political analyst at the Universiti Putra Malaysia, Najib's latest credibility challenge is because he is perceived as a weak leader.

Najib, he says, had been seen as not providing firm, decisive leadership within his own party and in the federal government.

"This is happening because he is perceived as weak... people do not listen to him and under his leadership, there are disciplinary problems," he says.

UiTM Associate Professor Shaharuddin Badaruddin, however, offers a cautious assessment by acknowledging that the entire crisis was a cause of concern for Najib.

Najib cannot afford to lose another state if a snap election is called in the east coast state to resolve the current political quagmire, he said.

"This is a big test for Najib. He needs to make sure the state will remain within BN. The last option for him is to dissolve the state assembly," he says, adding the Malay party needs to resolve this quickly.

However, Professor James Chin of Monash University Malaysia does not foresee this crisis weakening Najib, saying that the prime minister's position will only be weakened if there is a change of government in Terengganu.

He says it is common knowledge that Ahmad Said was supposed to go when his one-year tenure after the 13th general election was up.

"He's not happy with the current deal. So he's doing this to get a better deal. The question is, what's the price Umno is willing to pay for Ahmad Said to go quietly?" said the political analyst.

Chin believes the crisis would not have any impact on Malaysia's political landscape, terming it "Umno's internal domestic problem".

"They know that they need a new menteri besar to prepare for the next general election, if Ahmad Said stays, they'll be finished," he adds.

Ahmad Said was believed to be the initiator of the political impasse in Terengganu. The former menteri besar quit Umno just hours after he was replaced by Datuk Ahmad Razif Abdul Rahman as Terengganu menteri besar on Monday.

Ahmad Said was responding to Najib's authorisation of his resignation letter – which he had signed before his re-appointment as menteri besar for a second term after GE13 last year – despite pleas for his removal to only be effective after his daughter's wedding on May 17.

The letter was said to pacify Umno members unhappy with Ahmad Said as menteri besar. The party had agreed that Ahmad Said be allowed to remain as menteri besar for only one more year.

Ahmad Said's decision to leave Umno led to two other Terengganu assemblymen following suit: Ajil assemblyman Ghazali Taib, and Bukit Besi assemblyman Roslee Daud.

All three declared themselves as independent representatives.

But Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim yesterday announced that one of the three assemblymen who quit the party to become independent has "returned" to Umno.

Shahidan said Roslee Daud has retracted his decision to leave the party and sit in the Terengganu legislative assembly as an Independent member.

"Umno's position now is we have 15 seats, PAS 14, PKR one, and two independents," he told The Malaysian Insider last night. – May 14, 2014.

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