

## **Umno can weather 1MDB storm before GE14, Sabah Umno leader says**

**Malay Mail Online**

**August 11, 2015**

**By JULIA CHAN**

KOTA KINABALU, Aug 11 — Amidst rumours of a growing rivalry between Umno's top two leaders, a senior leader from Sabah has insisted that the party will persevere through the brewing crisis the same way it has previous ones.

Sabah deputy liaison chairman Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak pointed out that Umno went through several critical points in its history and that the row between the party's president and his deputy over 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) will be resolved before the coming general election.

"History has shown that each time there is a general election, Umno and Barisan Nasional will close ranks. That is what will also happen in the next general election," he said, adding that Umno has faced similar internal strife sporadically since before the country reached its independence.

"I would not say that the current divide is worse than the ones in 1970, 1981, 1987, 1998 or 2006. The earlier ones were probably worse. But each time Umno survived it and moved on," he said in an email interview with *Malay Mail Online*.

The newly-appointed communications and multimedia minister conceded that any form of division was detrimental, but said that such was the nature of political parties.

What is critical for Umno at this juncture was to contain the fallout from the disagreement, he said without offering what this would entail.

Umno has experienced numerous times of intense difficulties, but the closest it has come to calamity was the 1987 "Team A vs Team B" leadership crisis that led to the deregistration of the party.

The 1998 sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, then deputy to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, also led to another deep schism in the party, one that eventually saw Dr Mahathir resign as president and prime minister five years later.

But while the previous crises arose from an internal tussle for power, more recent ones have been prompted by Dr Mahathir's vehement criticism of his successors.

Having hounded Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi out of office, Dr Mahathir has again turned his sights on yet another successor, this time over Putrajaya's handling of 1MDB.

He has and continues to demand Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak resign over the state-owned firm's debts, and although his was initially a "lonely" crusade, Dr Mahathir eventually won over other Umno leaders including Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Muhyiddin's criticism of 1MDB was first couched in diplomacy, but late last month he went off on an unrestrained tirade over how Putrajaya was handling the controversy and its critics including suspending two newspapers.

The salvo was followed by a sudden Cabinet reshuffle that saw Najib dropping Muhyiddin as deputy prime minister along with Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, another open dissenter over the same issue.

Although Muhyiddin has pledged not to fuel a new crisis within Umno that is arguably yet to recover from Dr Mahathir's previous campaign against Abdullah, his tone has been far from reconciliatory following his sudden removal.

The former deputy prime minister has traded barbs with party colleagues since his exit, notably mocking Umno information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan and Umno supreme council member Datuk Abdul Aziz Kaprawi over public rebukes.

Muhyiddin's replacement as deputy prime minister, Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, in turn has dismissed the former's recent outbursts as the ramblings of an "angry" and "upset" man.

Muhyiddin and Shafie's removal have already prompted grumblings within Umno divisions in their home states of Johor and Sabah, respectively, evidenced by Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin repeated exhortations for Umno "not to remain silent".

Battle lines also appear to be forming within the Umno divisions, with some choosing to snub Muhyiddin while others have kept their doors open for him to attend their meetings, providing him with a platform to continue lashing out over 1MDB.

Despite the indications of a growing split in Umno, Salleh remained adamant that it was the "nature of the beast" that is political parties.

"Rivalry is normal in any political party – even PKR, PAS and DAP have power struggles - it is normal to have differences of opinion and approach on certain issues but whatever our differences, we will always be able to find amicable solutions to the issues that need to be addressed," he said.

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