

Muhyiddin can be 'free agent' in Umno, says veteran newsman
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Former deputy prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin can now be a "free Umno agent" among the fractured party's grassroots as he is still its deputy president, says veteran newsman Datuk A. Kadir Jasin.

But Muhyiddin has to be careful in doing this as the Umno Supreme Council, who are all "in the pocket" of the president, can eliminate him from the party over disciplinary issues, adds Kadir.

The former New Straits Times group editor-in-chief was referring to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who is also the president of Umno.

Najib sacked Muhyiddin from his cabinet on Tuesday after the number two had openly questioned the prime minister over his handling of debt-laden 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), which is Najib's brainchild.

"With his sacking from Cabinet, Muhyiddin can now act as a free agent representing the grassroots of Umno as he is still Umno deputy president," Kadir said in a blog posting today.

"Muhyiddin can make Umno inclusive again by interacting with the grassroots although attempts are being made to stop him from getting close to party members."

The Malaysian Insider reported yesterday that several Umno divisions have cancelled the invitations they had sent to Muhyiddin to officiate their annual general meetings, despite the fact that his position in the party remains unchanged.

A source from Umno said they were worried Muhyiddin may criticise Najib and 1MDB in his speeches at party division meetings.

However, some defiant Umno divisions, such as Kluang, Hulu Selangor and Kemaman, are sticking by their decision to invite Muhyiddin to attend their assemblies, saying they were ready to face any repercussions from it.

Despite this, Kadir said that Muhyiddin and his supporters may not be able to change anything at the top level of the party or in the government.

"But they can change the perception and the support of the people and voters," the veteran journalist added.

"Najib may have successfully held on to power but every day passes with the economy becoming shakier, the ringgit weaker, capital markets weaker and Malaysia the subject of jokes around the world."

Muhyiddin's sacking from the cabinet as deputy prime minister and education

minister comes amid investigations by a special government task force into alleged financial scandal at state investment firm 1MDB

Also dropped as minister was Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, an Umno vice-president, who had also been critical of Najib's handling of 1MDB.

The state investment firm has racked up debts of RM42 billion. The firm is owned by the Finance Ministry, which is led by Najib, who is also chairman of 1MDB's advisory board.

Najib also terminated the services of Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail on Monday, although he was due to retire on October 6, and replaced by former federal judge Tan Sri Mohamed Apandi Ali.

Gani was a member of the special task force probing the 1MDB scandal.

Opposition lawmakers said that the moves were a tactic to affect investigations into the 1MDB and have called for a no-confidence vote motion to be tabled in the Dewan Rakyat against Najib. – July 31, 2015.

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