

Najib is a liability to Umno, say party grassroots
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By Md Izwan

Some Umno grassroots members, who now feel uneasy facing the public, are saying that scandal-tainted Datuk Seri Najib Razak is a liability to the party.

Trust among the rank and file towards the party president has been affected by ongoing controversies, from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) to the RM2.6 billion put in his personal accounts, allegedly as a donation, with members finding it hard to swallow the explanations given.

"The people want Najib to step down. Even if we talk nicely they do not want to hear, so what more to say?"

"Umno members still love Umno, but Umno members no longer love Najib," said former Tenggara Umno youth committee member Asrul Esreen Mohd Salleh to The Malaysian Insider.

Asrul was one of the grassroots leaders who quit his post over unhappiness with Najib, and blamed the prime minister as one of the reasons why the people are losing their trust in the Malay ruling party.

"We do not want to see a situation whereby because of Datuk Seri, the people lose their trust in Umno," he said in referring to Najib's honorific title.

He also agreed with the formula mooted by former party president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for Najib, who is also the prime minister, to step down while maintaining the current government, stressing that the proposal was not to topple the government but only to replace the prime minister.

"If the prime minister receives a no-confidence vote from parliamentarians and the motion gets majority support, then he has to step down. But the existing government will not fall," Asrul added.

The plan for a no-confidence vote using statutory declarations against Najib by federal lawmakers from both sides of the political divide was revealed recently by deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who said he had to put a stop to it.

An anonymous blog then wrote the names of 20 Barisan Nasional MPs who were involved in the plot, but they later denied it.

Rumblings at the grassroots level against Najib have been audible, as seen from some party division meetings that have taken place. One outburst that was recorded on video and which went viral was that of Langkawi Umno Wanita Anina Saadudin, who said Najib had "lied" to Umno members by claiming all of them supported him.

Such internal turmoil is causing low morale, said former Keliang branch youth chief Moohamad Faizal Abdul Raub.

"We, the grassroots, are helpless to face the public's scorn and accusations. It is the grassroots who have to face the people, but not the leaders who do not know the sentiment on the ground.

"Are other Umno members willing to see their own party damaged by the attitude of such leaders," he said in an interview.

Before this, Faizal said they were still able to counter issues played up by the opposition but the revelation over the RM2.6 billion in Najib's personal accounts had eroded their trust.

"Initially (Najib) said he wanted to sue and did not admit the allegation regarding RM2.6 billion. But after the MACC announcement, they admitted.

"Do you think the people on the ground do not know how to evaluate matters?" he asked, referring to Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's (MACC) announcement that the money was a donation and not from 1MDB.

Faizal had also stepped down from his post in May due to unhappiness over the turmoil engulfing the party.

The Umno Youth machinery is one of the most active in the party and helps a lot during election campaigns but Faizal said his friends in the party are now feeling listless following recent developments.

"Enthusiasm among my friends in the youth movement has faded. We are the ones who will go to the ground to campaign and meet with the people. But the top leaders refuse to listen to voices on the ground," he said.

More disappointingly, Najib has made many selfish decisions, for example, last month's Cabinet reshuffle, said Asrul.

"If it is true that the president decided to reshuffle the Cabinet by asking over (mobile messaging app) WhatsApp, this means he no longer believes or is confident with the supreme council, and no longer respects the existing council," he said.

Umno observer Shahbudin Husin said he does not discount the possibility that if elections were to be held soon, Najib's posters will not be prominently displayed – unlike previous times – because of the negative perception towards him.

"Do not be surprised if there is a by-election in the near future, Najib's pictures will not be used during campaigning," he said, adding that this would be an indicator of current public sentiments towards the prime minister.

Political analyst Dr Azizuddin Mohd Sani said Umno now is facing a leadership crisis and 1MDB, which is seen as being associated with the party.

"One of the main issues facing Umno now is leadership and for sure, one of it is related to 1MDB, which is seen as being synonymous with the party itself," he added.
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