

Kedah folk love Mukhriz yet Umno wants to play politics, say observers

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By Md Izwan

The two-week old menteri besar saga in Kedah in which Umno leaders seek to oust Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir shows how the ruling Malay party is unable to accept a culture which transcends politics to get work done, say Kedah folk, including grassroots leaders from his party.

Mukhriz has shown that he could administer the state without paying heed to political ideology and this was something Kedah Umno leaders could not accept, observers told The Malaysian Insider.

And the son of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is popular among ordinary folk, regardless of their political allegiance.

"I saw for myself how the people of Kedah love Mukhriz. During a programme in Sanglang the other day, many who turned up were teachers and students from the pondok schools," said Maj Anuar Abdul Hamid, a grassroots leader from Umno's Jalan Badlishah branch in the northern state.

"This is one leader who is willing to sleep in a pondok. Has any past leader done the same?"

"Even PAS leaders are comfortable with Mukhriz," he said.

Anuar said he attended many of Mukhriz's programmes and was keeping track of developments since 14 Umno division chiefs in a press conference on January 20 announced their loss of confidence in Mukhriz, who is also Kedah Umno liaison chief.

Anuar said the challenge towards Mukhriz's leadership came as a shock since he has not been embroiled in any scandal and has a clean record in the two years running the state.

Mukhriz's fate could be sealed today as the Kedah Regency Council meets all state Barisan Nasional assemblymen on the matter.

Former Kedah Umno secretary Zahran Abdullah said the group calling for Mukhriz's ouster was power hungry.

"They are relics but they are still power hungry," said Zahran, who served in the state Umno office in 2010.

"We want more youth, so Mukhriz is the best candidate. We want Mukhriz to continue administering the state."

The anti-Mukhriz faction has said they wanted the menteri besar out because he could not unite the party and machinery in Kedah, has no strategies for the next general election and spent too much time in Kuala Lumpur.

However, locals The Malaysian Insider spoke to said they had no issue with Mukhriz's absence from the state.

"I support Mukhriz and I'm unhappy with what happened," said Aishah Aziz, a worker at Starbucks coffee in Aman Sentral.

"Why do they want to overthrow the menteri besar? It's not a major problem if Mukhriz stays in Kuala Lumpur."

Businesswoman Maznah Abdullah, 45, said the people were happy with Mukhriz because his image was clean and he was not bogged down by scandals.

"What did Mukhriz do wrong? Is he a bad person? As far as I know, he never triggered any controversy," she said.

Even the state opposition appeared to be behind Mukhriz, with PAS's Pokok Sena MP Datuk Mahfuz Omar indirectly declaring his support for the menteri besar.

"The choice we have now is to maintain Mukhriz as the menteri besar until his tenure ends, because then everything will surely return to the status quo," said the veteran PAS leader.

The opposition party has not made any indication that it supports Mukhriz's ouster – it has only said it was confident of wresting back the state in the next general election which is due in 2018.

"PAS is confident that the 14th general election will be fruitful for PAS. The menteri besar saga is a bonus for PAS," said Kedah PAS commissioner Dr Ahmad Fakhruddin Fakhruddin.

He said he has no problem with Mukhriz's religious image, adding that that could be one reason the menteri besar was popular.

Mukhriz, in what appeared to be a last-ditch attempt to strike back at his opponents, said yesterday Kedah Umno division chiefs and wing leaders who demanded his removal should apologise to the sultan and Regency Council for their action.

He also said the executive councillors who did not attend the Kedah exco meeting last Wednesday which he chaired, should also apologise for failing to carry out their duty. – February 1, 2016.

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