4 likely candidates to replace Mukhriz as MB

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Kedah Umno veteran Bashah leads pack as he is most experienced

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At least four Kedah Umno leaders are in the running to become the next menteri besar should embattled incumbent Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir be replaced.

Kedah Umno liaison committee deputy chief Datuk Seri Ahmad Bashah Md Hanipah, who on Wednesday led a group of state party leaders to declare their loss of confidence in Mukhriz, was heavily-tipped to be a candidate.

The veteran Umno leader, who is the Bakar Bata assemblyman, had been active in politics since the 1980s. Bashah played an instrumental role in helping Barisan Nasional (BN) wrest back the state from Pas in the 13th General Election.

Despite his success as the state BN election director, Bashah's chances of becoming the menteri besar were dashed when Mukhriz was appointed to helm the state government in 2013.

Bayu assemblyman Datuk Azmi Che Husain, meanwhile, is rumoured to be the next in line should Bashah fail to make the cut.

Azmi, who is also deputy state assembly speaker, is a prominent Umno figure and is well-known for his work in various non-governmental organisations.

The third candidate is Datuk Dr Ku Abd Rahman Ku Ismail, who has served as the Guar Chempedak assemblyman since March 2008, and is the state Industry and Investment Committee chairman.

Datuk Ahmad Lebai Sudin, a staunch critic of Mukhriz's leadership, is another state Umno leader in the running.

The Bukit Lada assemblyman had, in the past, called for Mukhriz's resignation because of the latter's "inability" to bring development to the state.

Lebai had also accused Mukhriz of failing to fulfil BN's election manifesto and refusing to pledge loyalty to prime minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

When contacted yesterday, Bashah said any of the Umno assemblymen in Kedah were capable of helming the state.

He also downplayed speculation that he would replace Mukhriz, who is Ayer Itam assemblyman.

"I don't know (about my name being in the forefront)... everyone has an equal chance. It is up to the prime minister to decide and we will support whoever he chooses. He knows best," he said.

In GE13, BN won 21 of the 36 state seats it contested. Umno has 19 seats while two are held by MCA.

Bashah also dismissed rumours of a split in Kedah Umno as a result of the ongoing crisis.

"No, there is no such thing (as a split). As I have said, this is a collective decision and almost everyone who attended yesterday's (Friday's) meeting shared the same sentiment. No one said anything different. "Najib knows very well what is happening in the state. In fact, he knows more than us. He is, after all, the prime minister," he said, adding that they would give Najib some time to resolve the crisis.

"We will wait."

Bashah said as long as Kedah Umno leaders and members remained united, it was not impossible for BN to retain the state in the next general election.

"It is not easy but we have proven that we can do it. We took over the state from the opposition in the last general election. As long as we work as a team, nothing is impossible," said Bashah, who is also the former state Umno liaison committee chairman.

Elected Umno representatives at the state and federal level had expressed their dissatisfaction over Mukhriz's leadership, citing a loss of confidence over his failure to unite the party and its machinery in Kedah, as well as his lack of strategies to face the next election.

At a press conference on Wednesday, Bashah and most of the state Umno leaders also claimed that Mukhriz had not governed well since becoming menteri besar in 2013.

A meeting was held on Friday at the Putra World Trade Centre between the Kedah Umno leaders and Najib to discuss the unfolding crisis. Mukhriz was not present.

Political analyst Associate Professor Dr Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani of Universiti Utara Malaysia was
confident that Bashah would be the next Kedah menteri besar.

“This is based on the fact that Bashah is the next most senior state Umno leader after Mukhriz. He also appears to have a good working relationship with Najib,” he told the New Sunday Times.

Former Kuala Kedah Umno division chief Datuk Latt Shariman Abdullah said the person who lead the state must be a team player and someone who could inspire the people and his peers.

“He should be a doer, who knows what to do and can work well as a team, commanding the support of the people,” he said.

Latt, however, declined to name the most suitable candidate and said “all are my friends”. Additional reporting by Adrian Lai
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