

Daggers still out despite Najib's solidarity meet

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By Nigel Aw

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak may be trying to pull off a public show of support this Sunday with a meeting of Umno division leaders but it is unlikely to stop the forces out to unseat him, say analysts.

While the show of force is meant to convince the grassroots that all is well with his leadership, it will do little, if at all, to placate Najib's opponents from among the elite, including former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said Merdeka Centre director Ibrahim Suffian.

"Right now, we are looking at what is mainly a way to show the public that the prime minister has the support of Umno's rank and file leaders.

"But it does not change anything at the elite level which is hidden from the public eye with its work really being done in the shadows," he told Malaysiakini yesterday.

Nonetheless, Ibrahim (left) said even though the effectiveness of such a gathering has its constraints, it is still needed to keep abreast of the sentiment of Umno division leaders.

This, he said, is because the most practical way to unseat a prime minister is through an internal coup in Umno.

Second meet in six months

The fact that Najib is organising the second such meeting in a little over six months suggests he is mindful of this and is counter-manoeuvring to prevent being unexpectedly ousted from within his party.

"He needs to do such gatherings as many times as it takes to ensure support is still on his side as the threats against him have been persistent," he said.

Najib had on Aug 28 last year organised a gathering of 160 Umno division leaders to show their solidarity shortly after Mahathir had publicly withdrew support for Najib and had lashed out at him.

The latest meeting, slated for March 8, comes amid controversy over 1Malaysia Development Berhad's (1MDB) massive RM40 billion debt and international spotlight on Najib's substantial wealth.

Cheras Umno division chief Syed Ali Alhabshee denied the meeting had anything to do with the troubles plaguing Najib, describing it instead as a show of support for the prime minister.

Meanwhile, Umno vice president Shafie Apdal downplayed the meeting, saying that it is "normal" to get feedback from grassroots members.

However, political scientist Wong Chin Huat, who is a fellow at Penang Institute, said the prime minister would not be organising such a show of support if he is not under threat.

"Malaysia is not North Korea, we don't normally pledge loyalty or support to leaders.

"It is like a wife suddenly declaring her loyalty to her husband. She wouldn't normally do that unless somebody has accused her of fooling around," he told Malaysiakini.

As such, Wong said despite efforts to downplay the meeting, it is clearly meant to send a message to Najib's opponents that he still controls majority support in the party.

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