

PM meeting Umno division heads - again

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is scheduled to meet Umno division leaders again this coming Monday, May 11, which will be his second such meeting in two months.

Incidentally, the date of the coming meeting coincides with the 69th anniversary of the party, which dominates the ruling BN coalition.

Kuala Terengganu Umno head Mohd Sabri Alwi said the coming meeting was nothing out of the ordinary.

"It is a routine meeting with the prime minister, for him to talk to us about current affairs and for us to pledge our support," Sabri said when contacted.

Kinabatangan division head Bung Mokhtar Radin said Najib was expected to discuss several "hot topics" during the meeting, which will be held in Putrajaya.

"The meeting is to clarify many issues, such as the implementation of the goods and services tax, which is still a hot topic.

"There are thousands of zero-rated GST products but people are still paying GST," Bung Mokhtar told Malaysiakini.

However, he dismissed suggestions that the meeting was designed for Umno strongmen to show solidarity with their party president.

"I don't think so. We division heads did that once. But our support for the prime minister is forever. This meeting is on current affairs," Bung Mokhtar said.

Other issues which Najib may have to deal with include the poor showing by Umno in yesterday's Rompin by-election where the party held on to its stronghold with a dramatically slashed majority.

Nothing to do with money

On March 8, Najib met with leaders of 160 out of the 191 Umno divisions, during which he briefed them on the beleaguered 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB).

During that period time, a large volume of leaked documents had suggested there were massive irregularities in 1MDB's dealings, leading to its RM42 billion debt.

Najib had on March 4 instructed the auditor-general to conduct an audit on 1MDB, although the audit's terms of reference have yet to be made public.

The coming May 11 meeting was brought to public attention by former NSTP group editor A Kadir Jasin, who claimed in an article in his blog that the event was designed to show Umno solidarity with Najib.

Kadir (left) also claimed that about 60 Umno division leaders, who are not MPs, would be given a special allocation of RM500,000 during the meeting.

This allegation was dismissed by both Sabri and Bung Mokhtar.

"We're not meeting about money. Moreover, all division heads are scheduled to attend the meeting, not just 60 of them," Sabri said.

'Jumping to conclusions'

Bung Mokhtar, in referring to Kadir, said outsiders should not simply jump to conclusions on the motive behind Umno leaders meeting with Najib.

"No RM500,000, not even RM50... don't think that whenever we meet the PM, the PM will give us something. No such thing, we have to respect the prime minister. We know what to do," he said.

Kadir's claims on this special funding was premised on the fact that Health Minister Dr S Subramaniam had admitted his ministry was facing budget cuts.

It is likely that the Health Ministry is not the only ministry facing budget cuts, said Kadir, citing an anonymous senior government officer who claimed his ministry had RM2 billion slashed from its budget to pay for post-flood relief efforts.

Kadir is closely linked to former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and is known to have an extensive grapevine network within Umno.

However, many Umno division leaders who were contacted claimed that they were not aware of any meeting with Najib to be held on May 11.

At the time of writing, the Prime Minister's Office has not responded to requests from Malaysiakini for its comment on Kadir's article.