

Kedah Umno 'unhappy' with Pak Lah
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The pressure on Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi went up another notch today with Kedah Umno leaders purportedly criticising his stewardship. MCPX

najib tun razak 03The 15 Umno divisions in the state - which is now under opposition control - had attended an election post-mortem meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and other top leaders at a resort in Sungai Petani.

According to a source, some of the division representatives had blamed the premier for Barisan Nasional's (BN) disastrous performance in the March 8 polls.

It is believed that there were also calls for Najib to challenge Abdullah for the Umno presidency in the party polls scheduled for December 16-20.

It is learnt that the three-hour meeting - which started at 11am - witnessed a slew of heated remarks being passed forcing Najib to call for calm.

"Some of the division representatives also noted that (former premier) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) during his 22 years in power did not cause BN and Umno to lose so big.

pak lah and umno 60th anniversary celebration in johor" They also criticised Abdullah for not listening to ground reports (on the dissatisfaction of the people) but choosing instead to forge ahead with his own plans," he added.

In the elections, the ruling coalition failed to secure a two-third majority in Parliament and lost four additional states - including Kedah - to the opposition.

Since then, Abdullah has come under intense pressure to quit with Umno veterans like Mahathir and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah leading the charge.

However - Abdullah who took over the reins from Mahathir in 2003 - has dismissed these calls. Najib has also pledged support for the prime minister.

Umno losing power

Meanwhile, the source said some of the division representatives also complained about how Umno was losing its power in relation to royalties rejecting two menteri besar proposed by Abdullah.

These were Shahidan Kassim in Perlis and Idris Jusoh in Terengganu.

After a brief stand off with the respective palaces, Putrajaya conceded and allowed the Sultans to swear in their choices - Dr Md Isa Sabu in Perlis and Ahmad Said in Terengganu.

Also present at the meeting with Najib were Umno vice-presidents Muhyiddin Yassin and Mohd Ali Rustam, Wanita chief Rafidah Aziz, secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor, party information chief and Selangor Umno head Muhammad Muhd Taib, Puteri

Umno chief Noraini Ahmad and Putera Umno chief Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim.

Among the notable local leaders who attended were former Kedah menteri besar Mahdzir Khalid, former information minister Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, his brother and Kulim/Bandar Baru division chief Aziz Sheikh Fadzir and Kubang Pasu division chief Johari Baharom who is also deputy minister in the prime minister's department.

Banner put up

Several division leaders contacted by Malaysiakini later declined to comment saying that it was a closed-door meeting.

However, Abdul Azeez denied that the issue of Najib taking on Abdullah was raised by those present.

It is also learnt that prior to the meeting, a group of Umno grassroots supporters had put up a banner calling on Najib to take over the party.

Each division sent nine delegates to the meeting.

Discontentment has been brewing on the ground in Kedah against Abdullah even before the elections due to the choice of candidates.

"The state had come up with its list but Putrajaya made amendments to this at the eleventh hour and this angered the local leaders.

"At that point, there was already talk of possible sabotage and seats falling into the hands of the opposition. Abdullah himself has now admitted that sabotage was a factor," said an observer.

Yesterday, Malaysiakini reported that Umno division leaders in Johor had asked Abdullah to go on leave and hand over control to his deputy.

"This (Abdullah going on leave) is the best way to save Umno from becoming a directionless party.

"The more Abdullah talks more confusion arises," said a division leader who attended a meeting with Johor Menteri Besar Abdul Ghani Othman early this week.