

Najib mum on power transfer plan
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Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Najib Abdul Razak today declined to respond to any "political questions", saying that answers will be revealed at a special Umno meeting in 24 hours.

Speaking to reporters in Putrajaya this afternoon, the Umno deputy president sidestepped queries on the rumours that the party polls might be put off to next year.

He focused only on the issue at hand - the granting of an extra RM100 million in allocation for a low-cost housing scheme.

"Political questions will only be answered tomorrow," he said, adding fuel to the already burning speculations surrounding the status of the Umno leadership.

Earlier, the media got wind that the Umno supreme council would hold an emergency meeting tomorrow morning. This has since been confirmed by the deputy premier and other Umno ministers.

"I believe that there is a special MT (Majlis Tertinggi) tomorrow," he said.

Rumours are rife that Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in his bid to stave off challenges to his position, is in the midst of negotiating terms including the postponement of the party's elections to next year.

There is also talk that Abdullah might agree to step down next year - a year earlier than his stated timeline of 2010.

Najib had last night cancelled a trip to the US, where he was due to make his maiden speech to an United Nations assembly.

But he said the postponement had nothing to do with the current political wrangling inside Umno.

Higher allocation for low-cost housing

Meanwhile, the press conference at the Ministry of Finance was arranged to announce an increase in allocation for housing under the Rumah Mesra Rakyat scheme.

Reading out from a statement, Najib said that the government has increased the allocation by another RM100 million for this year and 2009.

The allocation, he said, will enable them to build 1,500 additional RMR houses. The houses will be constructed by Syarikat Perumahan Negara Berhad.

To be eligible for the scheme, household incomes must be less than RM1,500 while the age eligibility is between 21-65 years old. Applicants or their relatives must also have their own land.

Under the scheme, successful applicants need only pay for two-thirds of the construction cost as the remainder is borne by the government.

Owners will be required to pay RM150 each month for a term of 23-29 years. Interest-free loans will also be given to eligible applicants.

Since the scheme was introduced in 2002, 6551 units at a cost of RM310 million has been built and handed over to their owners whilst 6,263 units (costing RM 425 million) is due to be ready by March 2009.

The houses are estimated to cost between RM70,000 (Peninsular Malaysia) and RM 80,000 (East Malaysia).

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