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Najib loyalists invite DPM to open meeting

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PETALING JAYA: The Cheras Umno division, known to be staunchly loyal to Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, has invited Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin to open its division meeting tonight.

The move has raised eyebrows, but its plain-speaking chief Datuk Seri Syed Ali Alhabshee said there was nothing out of the ordinary in having the Umno deputy president open the meeting.

"I am not anybody's man. I am an Umno man. Everything I say or criticise is out of love for my party," he said.

Cheras is among Umno's 191 divisions which must hold annual meetings between today and Aug 31.

The meetings would be closely watched as they would provide a rough indication of the grassroots' sentiment towards party president Najib.

On Saturday, Kedah Umno chief and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir opened Cheras Umno's Youth, Wanita and Puteri wings' meetings.

His invitation drew much attention as Mukhriz's father, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is the most vocal critic of Najib's leadership.

Najib has been under attack over allegations involving 1MDB and there has been much talk over whether Umno would stand by him.

"I am on good terms with Najib, Muhyiddin and Dr Mahathir. Whatever we do as Umno members must be for the interest of the party,"

Syed Ali said.

Although Umno has delayed its internal polls by 18 months, this year's division meetings are important to gauge whether there is any groundswell of unhappiness over Najib's leadership.

Strong support for the president during the meetings would indicate that the party would likely rally behind him.

Among the notable divisions whose meetings Najib is expected to open are Semporna, led by vice-president Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal; Pasir Gudang, whose chief is Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohd Khaled Nordin; and Kuala Nerus, where Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Ahmad Razif Abdul Rahman is the head.

Muhyiddin's calendar is similarly marked with such engagements.

Apart from Cheras, the deputy president is scheduled to be at the Kemaman Umno meeting, where former Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Said is the chief, and in Hulu Terengganu, whose division head is Communications and Multimedia deputy minister Datuk Jailani Johari.

Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor advised party members to use the divisional meetings to discuss "beneficial" issues, including what needed to be done to win the confidence and support of voters in the next general election.

"Tell us what we should do to make the party stronger. Tell us what we have promised the people but have not fulfilled.

"We need to be strong and this can only happen if we are united," said the Umno secretary-general.