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Najib to address burning issues

PM will have his say on 1MDB and Muhyiddin's dismissal from Cabinet

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PETALING JAYA: The Umno general assembly will open on Thursday after a stormy year that saw party president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak weathering a relentless series of attacks over the 1MDB saga.

But Najib has survived the attacks and he will be addressing the annual gathering at the PWTC, confident that he has the clear-cut support of his party's rank and file.

An Umno source said Najib intends to take the bull by the horns in his presidential address and will confront some of the burning issues that are of concern to the party.

Among the likely topics in his speech will be the 1MDB issue, the dismissal of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin from the Cabinet as well as the criticism from party grandee Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The grassroots members have yet to hear directly from him on the sacking of their deputy president and this will be Najib's first opportunity to put forth his arguments on the big stage.

Dr Mahathir's enmity towards Najib has also caused great concern to the party and the delegates will want to hear from their president on whether the impasse can be resolved.

Najib is not going to ignore the elephant in the room even though Dr Mahathir will be seated in the



Power do: Dr Ahmad Zahid greeting a guest at Tajuddin's (second from left) residence. With them are (from left) Tajuddin's wife Datin Rohkiah Abdul Samat, his daughter Sri Rahayu and Abdullah Fauzi Ahmad Razali.
— M. Azhar Arif / The Star

audience and his estranged deputy president will be seated on stage.

However, said the source, Najib will choose his words carefully and that he will be polite but the message will be unmistakable.

The Prime Minister had also set the tone on the 1MDB issue when he spoke at the national undergraduates leadership conference on Sunday when he likened the attacks on the 1MDB as a war of perception weighed in by "lies and not facts".

Umno supreme council member Tan Sri Annuar Musa foresees some

criticism from the debates but it will be done in a positive way.

"There will also be a spirit of consolidation because at the back of everyone's mind is the need to get prepared for the 14th general election.

"There will be no mud-slinging and even those who are critical will do it with the view of strengthening the party," said Annuar who is also Ketereh MP and Mara chairman.

Najib, said Annuar, also has strong support in the supreme council and the three Umno wings.

He said there were rumblings in the wings earlier on but the session with 1MDB CEO Arul Kanda Kandasamy has helped provide answers and cooled things down.

The general assembly is also taking place amid speculation that Muhyiddin and vice-president Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal may soon be sacked for actions detrimental to the party.

Last night, Muhyiddin, Shafie and Dr Mahathir took to the stage at Kelab Sultan Sulaiman to criticise Najib and, in the case of Dr

Mahathir, to repeat his calls for Najib to resign.

The show of defiance by the trio was timed to embarrass the leadership ahead of the general assembly.

Muhyiddin, in his most strident speech since losing his Cabinet post, said Najib should go on leave until the 1MDB investigation is completed.

On the same evening, there was a sort of show of support for Najib at the Bukit Damansara residence of Perak strongman Datuk Tajuddin Rahman.

Tajuddin, who is also a supreme council member and deputy minister, hosted a dinner for the supreme council members with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi attending as the guest of honour.

Tajuddin insisted it was a "social event" but the supreme council is the party's highest decision-making body and the gathering was seen as their way of demonstrating where they stand in the fallout between their president and deputy president.

It was also seen as a sort of declaration that they are all the "president's men".

All of the supreme council members and heads of the three Umno wings were there except for Najib.