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Lack of support doesn't bode well for Mukhriz

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STRAINED TIES:

Kedah party chiefs to raise issue with Najib today

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is expected to meet Kedah Umno leaders at Menara Dato Onn, Putra World Trade Centre at 4pm today.

Sources said the state Umno leaders include division chiefs, state assemblymen and state executive councillors, who will meet Najib to discuss the crisis involving Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir.

This is the latest development that comes two days after the protest by Kedah Umno division heads against Mukhriz, who yesterday moved to rally pockets of support, chiefly from his own division in Jerlun.

Kedah Umno liaison deputy chairman Datuk Seri Ahmad Bashah Md Hanipah, who has posed Mukhriz his first real challenge as a politician, was conspicuously quiet despite leading Wednesday's press conference to announce the Umno state leaders' loss of confidence in his boss' leadership. Phone calls to him went unanswered.

The situation could be described



Kedah Menteri Besar **Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir** and his wife **Toh Puan Norzieta Zakaria** attending the investiture in conjunction with the 88th birthday of the sultan of Kedah at Istana Anak Bukit in Alor Star yesterday. Pic by Amran Hamid

as critical. The Umno supreme council meeting, which was supposed to be held today, has been postponed to Jan 29.

Mukhriz has become the latest menteri besar caught in a leadership controversy after Perak (2009), Terengganu and Selangor (both in 2014).

As of press time, the media had yet to obtain the Umno secretary-general office's circular on the matter, but sources are saying that the Kedah menteri besar crisis needed to be observed

before being discussed by council members.

"Yes, it has been postponed due to the issue (Kedah menteri besar crisis). It needs to be scrutinised first," said a source.

Amid the strained atmosphere and allegations thrown against him,

it was business as usual for Mukhriz yesterday morning, where he attended the investiture held in conjunction with the 88th birthday of the Sultan of Kedah at Istana Anak Bukit in Alor Star.

Other functions outside the palace that he was scheduled to attend were cancelled. An insider close to his circle said Mukhriz had wanted to bare all at his division. This happened later in the evening, before some 300 of his supporters, where he struck back at his detractors.

Mukhriz was all smiles as he met supporters, who welcomed him with banners displaying words of encouragement.

A few interesting anecdotes also coloured the affair: Kedah Umno Wanita chief Datuk Maznah Hamid, who appeared with Bashah on Wednesday, was walking alongside Mukhriz yesterday.

In his speech, the son of former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad upped the ante in his defence. He vowed to fight against his

critics and declared that "two million" Kedahans were behind him.

Mukhriz reminded the audience that his appointment as Kedah menteri besar was mandated by the sultan of Kedah, the prime minister and "the people". He even took a leaf out of Datuk Seri Najib Razak's book — Mukhriz said he was willing to sit down with his critics and listen to their views.

But throughout the crisis, Mukhriz's criticism of his political enemies has raised the temperature up north. The crisis does not seem like it will abate soon, with each side hoping for its plans to pan out.

"We can say that things are getting heated around here. Although the second day of the crisis is rather muted by Bashah's silence, Mukhriz has upped the tempo in his speech," said a veteran Umno member.

Observers and pundits, however, are working to deduce the endgame of the crisis. Will Mukhriz be shown the door? Will he resign or will the state legislative assembly move to

'No action against 14'

KUALA LUMPUR: No disciplinary action will be taken against 14 Kedah Umno division chiefs, party secretary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor said yesterday.

He said the party leadership had monitored the press conference held by the division chiefs on Wednesday, asking Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak to make changes to the state leadership.

"They hope the Umno president can immediately make changes for the sake of the party and the people of the state.

"Therefore, there is no issue in which the Umno secretary-general should take disciplinary action against the 14 Kedah Umno division chiefs," he said here.

On Wednesday, almost all Umno assemblymen and members of parliament in the state had expressed their loss of confidence in the leadership of Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir as menteri besar and state Umno liaison chief. **Bernama**

hold a vote of no confidence?

For some, it appears that the end is nigh for Mukhriz's stay as Kedah Umno chief as well as menteri besar. They cited the unanimous voice of 13 out of 15 party division heads in Umno which spell doom for Mukhriz's prospects.

"He has lost more than two-thirds of support from the state (Umno) leaders. At least in the Umno sphere, he is no longer standing on a solid political foundation.

"Either way, even if he does not want to leave the menteri besar's office, the absence of strong party support does not bode well for his future. If the situation remains the same, Mukhriz might be ousted at the end of the day," said Universiti Utara Malaysia's Associate Professor Dr Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani.

The controversy is expected to continue for another week.

