

Ismail Sabri clips spark talk

Videos with ex-Umno leaders trigger allegiance switch rumours

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PETALING JAYA: Recent vital videos of Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob with several former Umno leaders who were booted out last year have raised eyebrows and triggered talk in the political circle about a possible switch of allegiance, say analysts.

Although it was a Hari Raya gathering, the analysts said it would set tongues wagging if the former prime minister and ex-Umno vice-president mingled with opposition Perikatan Nasional leaders.

In a video, Ismail Sabri, the incumbent Bera MP, can be seen being greeted by Perikatan leaders such as Opposition leader Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin and also mingling with former Umno warlords Tan Sri Annuar Musa, Tan Sri Noh Omar and Datuk Seri

Shahidan Kassim.

On May 19, Ismail Sabri was also spotted at an open house, hosted by Noh, held at a hotel in Kuala Lumpur.

But political analysts said it was unlikely that such a get-together would cause the fall of the current unity government, led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, anytime soon.

Universiti Sains Malaysia political science expert Prof Dr Sivamurugan Pandian said one should always remember that in politics, there were no permanent friends or enemies.

"There is only common interest in politics. In Ismail Sabri's case, he accepted the invitation to attend the Hari Raya open houses of his friends, who are now in the opposition.

"But for political observers, it seems to be beyond that. There will be speculation that some-

thing is brewing within Umno," he said.

"It appears that there is an undercurrent to bring those who are unhappy with the present Umno leadership to be with Ismail Sabri.

"As for whether the wave will gather momentum, it all depends on the upcoming six state elections," Sivamurugan added.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia political analyst Dr Mazlan Ali said the presence of Ismail Sabri raised the question of how far he would go to display his unhappiness with the current Umno leadership.

"He is obviously disappointed despite adhering to the party president's wishes to pave the way for the last general election.

"This is why he did not even defend his vice-presidency.

"Ismail Sabri believes the way forward for Umno is by joining

forces with Perikatan, which is mostly Malay-based parties.

"He, however, decided that he will not enter a confrontation with the current Umno leadership.

"The question now is whether he is willing to risk it all by playing with the enemies of the Umno president," he said.

Mazlan added that the gesture by Ismail Sabri also showed that there was a group within Umno who were unhappy with Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's leadership.

"But the recent Umno general assembly, which decided that the top two posts not be contested, clearly showed that Ahmad Zahid is very much in control.

"It is the culture of Umno to come around and support their leaders, despite not agreeing initially, for the sake of the party's survival," he said.