

Najib: Select panel won't affect timing of polls
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By Azura Abas

KUALA LUMPUR: The 13th general election could be held any time and was not bound by the work of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reforms, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday.

He, however said the government would try its best to implement any recommendation by the committee before the coming election to improve the electoral system.

"There are recommendations that can be done instantly and there are others which would take time," he told a press conference after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting.

Najib, who is Umno president, said the supreme council had also come up with ideas to improve the electoral system, and this would be forwarded to the representatives in the committee.

"The council also throws its support behind government's efforts to further improve the electoral system.

"The credibility of the electoral system should not be questioned or manipulated," said Najib.

On the move by the opposition to wait for terms of reference before deciding on their participation in the committee, Najib said the committee was the government's sincere offer so that decisions could be made based on consensus.

On allegations that Umno master- minded the recent raid by the Selangor Religious Affairs Department (Jais) on a church in Damansara Utama, Najib dismissed it and said it was illogical and a wild accusation.

He said the issue involved the administration of the Selangor government, which had the right to direct Jais to conduct any raid and not Umno.

"It does not make sense. They are just allegations. How can we (Umno) instruct people who are not under Umno?

"Jais is under whose authority? Not Umno. Who were the people who had done this, not Umno."

Najib pointed out that the matter should be addressed by the state government.

He said Umno maintained the principles stated in the Federal Constitution that Islam was the religion of the Federation, but that other faiths could be practised in any part of the country.

He also pointed out that a provision of the Constitution had stated Muslims here should not be proselytised by non-Muslims.

"Islam is the religion of the Federation and no one can taint the sanctity of Islam, including forcing or attempting to convert Malaysian Muslim into other faiths."

On Aug 3, Jais had carried out a check on the Damansara Utama Methodist Church after receiving information that Muslims were attending a function organised by the church and that Muslims were being proselytised.

Earlier, Najib revealed that Umno had 3,277,444 members to date with Sabah having the highest membership at 483,013.

He also announced that Dayang Juliana Awang Tambi, who stood as candidate under the Parti Cinta Malaysia ticket in the recent Sarawak election, had been sacked from Umno as the party's constitution disallowed its members to contest either under an independent or opposition ticket.

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