

**Umno mulls forming party discipline panel ahead of polls**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 28 — In the clearest sign yet that polls are near, Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced last night that for the first time Umno is considering activating its disciplinary committee ahead of the next general election.

The Umno president explained that the move was to strengthen party discipline and to prevent any sabotage of the party's election machinery before polls are called.

"We do not want something to happen after the election, when its effects have already taken place... so it is better to be more proactive.

"This will be our first time, in the sense that we are activating it (the committee) earlier," Najib (picture) told a press conference after chairing the party's supreme council meeting here last night.

The prime minister however denied that Umno was anticipating widespread sabotage from among its members during the coming polls, saying the measure was merely precautionary.

He said it was not uncommon to experience disciplinary problems during any election, particularly from disgruntled members who were not chosen as candidates.

"In a large party, there are bound to be those who oppose... Perhaps those who were not chosen as candidates and their followers, who then choose to support the opposition instead.

"Therefore, even at this moment, we must ensure discipline (in the party)," Najib said.

He said his deputy Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin would decide on the formation of the disciplinary committee and its composition.

It is widely speculated that the prime minister will call for early polls within months, capitalising on the feel-good factor arising from Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's sodomy acquittal earlier this month, cash handouts from Budget 2012 and his slew of reform promises, including pledges to increase civil freedom.

On Umno's state of preparedness to face the coming polls, Najib gave his thumbs up but said that more needed to be done to ensure every member plays his or her role to ensure victory.

"Therefore, the duties of all supreme council members must be carried out fully within the stipulated timeframe given," he said.

At the Umno general assembly last December, Najib told the party's top echelon to prioritise unity above self-interest and the general election above the party election.

He sounded the election war drums and called on all members to be reminded of the importance of fielding "winnable candidates" in an election he predicted would be "extraordinary".

Problems of infighting and sabotage, including party members voting against BN, were said to have contributed substantially to Umno's dismal performance in Election 2008 when the ruling pact lost its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority.

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