

Najib on trip to sort Sabah state issues before dissolving Parliament

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KOTA KINABALU: Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's two-day trip to Sabah beginning today will be closely watched as he is "diving" into the hotbed of Beaufort and Tuaran during his visit, likely to be his last to the state before Parliament is dissolved.

These two Parliamentary seats belonged to Barisan Nasional until recently when Umno supreme council member Datuk Lajim Ukin of Beaufort and Upko deputy president Datuk Wilfred Bumburing of Tuaran ditched the coalition.

The two turncoat MPs formed two NGOs aligned to Pakatan Rakyat and are likely to re-contest their seats under the PKR ticket.

Although the two claim they are dissatisfied with the Sabah leadership, the popular notion among Barisan is that they "leap-frogged" out of the coalition because they were unlikely to be fielded in the 13th general election.

Najib's visit to Sabah a state seen as a fixed deposit for Barisan will be to assess the ground and counter numerous allegations made by visiting Pakatan leaders such as Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Prime Minister will be in Beaufort, the heartland of the Bisaya community, tomorrow morning, and in the afternoon, he will be in Tuaran, where the Dusun of Lotod sub-ethnic group form the majority. Najib will be addressing the crowd on various issues and on top of the list will be illegal immigrants in the state.

The immigrant issue, which the Opposition and the two ex-Barisan members have been using to flog the Government, has somewhat been "diluted" when a Royal Commission of Inquiry was set up.

However, Opposition leaders have been taking advantage of the testimonies at the RCI although the hearing has a long way to go before any conclusion can be drawn.

Najib is also expected to tackle internal feuding not only among state Barisan parties but within state Umno leaders, especially on candidacy, when he meets them tonight.

Sabah Barisan secretary Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan said there had been a lot of accusations against the state and federal governments, particularly about lack of development, and Najib would use this meeting to explain to the people "Barisan's side of the story".

"There have been far too many wild accusations and there is no better person to explain all these than the Prime Minister himself. We will be give him a rousing welcome that reflects the coalition's strength in the two areas," he said.

Tamparuli assemblyman Datuk Jahid Jahim, whose constituency is under MP Bumburing's Tuaran seat, said there was no denying that the latter's ditching of the Barisan fold had had an impact but the effect was not strong enough to crumble the coalition's fort.

"The Prime Minister's visit will bring about the feeling of inclusiveness in the people. He has gone to other parts of Sabah and him coming to Tuaran will make the rakyat happy.

To say there is no development in the area is untrue. We will be pushing for whatever development that the former Barisan MP did not help materialise," he said.

The Prime Minister's trip is seen as crucial to keep the Barisan momentum upbeat in all the 25 parliamentary and 60 state seats in Sabah.

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