

**BN Will Skip Chempaka By-Election - Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 25 (Bernama) -- The Barisan Nasional (BN) will not be contesting the Chempaka by-election in Kelantan but instead will focus on post-flood relief work in the state, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said this was because post-flood relief work was in the process of being implemented to help the flood-victims.

"There are still many more floods victims deserving help and have not received assistance. We are making this our highest priority," he said after chairing an UMNO Supreme Council meeting here tonight.

Najib, who is also BN chairman and UMNO president, said apart from this, it (skipping the by-election) was also to ensure the people's solidarity was strengthened.

Although the people in Kelantan were divided by differing political ideologies, the solidarity of the "ummah" (people) was seen as an important agenda,' he said.

The Prime Minister said a similar decision was taken by the BN for the Bukit Gelugor parliamentary by-election in May 2014.

"So, we not necessarily have to put up a candidate (for by-elections)... it depends on the circumstances," he said.

Najib said a thorough discussion had been made with the Kelantan UMNO state Liaison Committee and the Pengkalan Chepa UMNO division before taking the decision.

The Chempaka state seat fell vacant following the death of the incumbent assemblyman Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat due to prostate cancer on February 12.

In the 13th general election, Nik Aziz, who was PAS's spiritual leader, won the seat with a majority of 6,500 votes.

The former Kelantan menteri besar obtained 12,310 votes while BN candidate Wan Razman Wan Abd Razak garnered 5,810 votes.

The Election Commission has set March 10 for nomination and March 22 for polling.

On the Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat, Najib said UMNO would wait for the Election Commission's (EC) decision following the decision by the family of the incumbent Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to petition for a Royal pardon over his sodomy conviction.

"So let us wait ... follow the interpretation of the Constitution and the EC will follow the advice based on this interpretation," he said.

Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and two of their children, Nurul Izzah and Nurul Nuha, had filed an application seeking for a Royal pardon from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on behalf of Anwar to the Istana Negara yesterday.

The petition for pardon is related to the conviction and five-year imprisonment of Anwar for sodomising his former aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan in 2008.

Anwar is currently held at the Sungai Buloh Prison after the Federal Court on Feb 10 dismissed his final appeal against the conviction and five-year jail sentence by the Court of Appeal.

On UMNO, Najib said the party's membership now stood at 3.47 million members, with 1,126 applications for membership received via online since the service was launched on January 27 till Feb 17.

Of these, 774 completed applications were processed and sent to the branches according to the applicants' addresses, he said.

"We hope more people will use this online service to apply for UMNO membership," he added.

Najib also said 21,245 UMNO branches nationwide were qualified to hold their annual branch meetings, which will start by March 13 and end on May 2.

Meanwhile, 19,871 Wanita UMNO, 15,111 UMNO Youth and 10,048 Puteri UMNO branches also qualified to hold their annual meetings, he added.

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