

BN will not contest Chempaka polls, says Najib

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By Md Izwan

Ruling coalition Barisan Nasional will not contest the Chempaka by-election, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today at the Umno supreme council meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

Najib, who is Umno president and BN chairman, said the coalition would instead focus on flood relief efforts in Kelantan, the state which houses the Chempaka seat.

The seat fell vacant after the death of its incumbent Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat of prostate cancer on February 12.

Najib said the decision was made after meeting Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Ahmad Yakob yesterday. Kelantan is still rebuilding areas devastated by floods in December, the worst that the peninsula has experienced in decades.

"The Umno supreme council has decided not to contest in the by-election," Najib told reporters after the meeting at the party's headquarters in the Putra World Trade Centre.

Besides flood-relief efforts, he said Umno also wanted to preserve Muslim unity in Kelantan, where the majority are Muslims and the state government is led by PAS, an Islamist party with the opposition.

"We feel that we need to work towards unity of Muslims even though we have different political persuasions, we need to prioritise the unity of believers," he said.

He said BN's decision not to contest the Chempaka by-election should not be disputed, as it had also chosen not to contest in previous by-elections, such as Bukit Gelugor.

Najib added that the no-contest decision was well received by the Umno grassroots.

Following Nik Aziz's death, a few Umno leaders such as Kelantan Umno chief Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed and Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin said it was not necessary for BN to contest the by-election.

Among the reasons cited was the need for the federal government to focus on helping the PAS state government rebuild Kelantan after the floods.

But there are also views that a no-contest move would fuel further speculation that Umno and PAS, arch-rivals who compete for the Muslim Malay vote, were eager to form a unity government in Kelantan. – January 25, 2015.

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