

Listless audience as Najib speaks at Pasir Gudang Umno division

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The more than 700 delegates at the Pasir Gudang Umno division's annual general meeting today appeared listless and uninterested when Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak took to the stage.

This was in stark contrast to their response when their division head Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin spoke to them.

The lively mood turned lacklustre as Najib touched current issues such as state investment firm 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) and the government's cash-aid programme 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M).

"Gentlemen, do you want BR1M again," the prime minister said, and was greeted by a soft muttering of "No" from some of the representatives.

"If you don't want it, I can cancel BR1M. Is there a better way?" he asked the delegates in his speech.

When he touched on alleged scandals involving previous administrations, the audience urged him to reveal the details, but Najib ignored their calls.

"In our history there have been many issues. 1MDB is not making a loss just yet.

"MAS was previously kept afloat with several billion ringgit, the sales of MAS shares was also problematic," Najib said, referring to the national carrier, Malaysia Airlines.

"If you want me to tell it, I will tell. If I tell, I will be opening a can of worms, if I don't, I will be blamed for it," he said.

Delegates, however, answered him by shouting: "Go ahead, open them!" but Najib ignored their calls.

Najib's presence in Johor today is his first time to the state since he dropped Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as deputy prime minister in a Cabinet reshuffle late last month.

Muhyiddin is the MP for Pagoh in Johor, and has been a stalwart of the state, leading it as menteri besar in the late 1980s and 1990s. His sacking from Cabinet, seen as a move by Najib to silence internal criticism over debt-ridden 1MDB, has angered several Johor Umno leaders at the grassroots.

Before Najib's arrival at the division meeting today, Khaled, who is also Johor Menteri Besar and Johor Umno chief, told delegates to be on their best behaviour and a good host to the prime minister.

Khaled also said Najib had himself requested to officiate the Pasir Gudang division meeting today.

"We are fortunate because we have the party president to officiate it.

"Two months ago, the president through the Umno secretariat informed that he wanted to officiate this meeting," Khaled said today in his speech at the division meeting.

"We will be good hosts and maintain discipline," he said.

But Khaled has also expressed concern about Umno's state of crisis and has warned members to act to save the party from being used to protect the interests of a few.

"Umno cannot keep quiet when the party no longer champions the cause of Malays but is instead used to defend a few under the name of loyalty or discipline in adhering to leaders," he had written in a recent Facebook post. – August 9, 2015.

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