

## **For Najib, it's either saving himself or Umno, say observers**

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**By Md Izwan**

Whether or not Umno deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin or leaders get sacked today at the party's highly anticipated Supreme Council meeting, the reality is that Umno is already a deeply divided party.

The only difference is today's meeting will determine whether the split in the country's largest party could worsen, say veterans and observers.

This was since the main causes of the party's rift were the scandals of president Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his decision to remove Muhyiddin from the Cabinet in July, said Umno veteran Tan Sri Zainuddin Maidin.

"Why should he be worried that the party would be more divided?" Zainuddin said when asked whether Muhyiddin's possible sacking from the party would worsen the rifts in Umno.

"Getting rid of Muhyiddin from the Cabinet has already divided the party," said Zainuddin, a former information minister and a staunch critic of Najib's leadership.

Talk is rife, despite denials by senior party leaders, that Muhyiddin and four other Umno leaders will be removed from the party for being critical of Najib and the latter's handling of the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal.

Najib dropped Muhyiddin as deputy prime minister in a Cabinet reshuffle in July, a move criticised by the party's grassroots members. Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, an Umno vice-president, was also dropped for the same reason.

A message circulating on WhatsApp claims that Muhyiddin and Shafie, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir, Datuk Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir, Datuk Seri Ahmad Said, Datuk Hamidah Osman and Datuk Jumat Idris will be axed from Umno in today's meeting.

Political analyst Dr Azizuddin Mohd Sani predicted that Muhyiddin's sacking would create a large wave of opposition internally towards Najib.

"Even now we are seeing the impact... the opposition towards Najib from the grassroots is actually quite strong."

Zainuddin said if Muhyiddin lost his party post, Najib risked further angering his party members who were already upset with Muhyiddin and Shafie's removal from the Cabinet.

He said other senior Umno leaders, who were also in Cabinet, have called for no action against Muhyiddin and Shafie despite the two's continued criticism of 1MDB. These

leaders are party vice-president Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein and Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin.

"If Najib goes ahead and sacks (Muhyiddin and Shafie), then it means he is also going against the wishes of people who are close to him."

Party vice-president Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi weighed in on the subject yesterday and dismissed talk that Muhyiddin and Shafie would be given the boot.

"I was never informed and there is no discussion about any dismissals.

"So, please do not raise suspicion and speculate on the matter," he told reporters at a press conference in Putrajaya.

Aziz, who is supposedly on the axed list, said he does not believe that Najib would go through with it.

"As long as I've known the president, he is not one for controversies or confrontations. I don't believe that he will agree with other council members who want the deputy and vice-president sacked.

"If they still decide to sack us, then it means the council is disconnected with the grassroots and the public. But I don't think the council is that crazy because this involves the deputy and the vice-president."

Instead, Aziz hoped the meeting today would find ways to bridge the differences between the president and his deputy so that work on winning the next general election could begin.

Former Johor Umno vice-chief Datuk Khairul Anuar Rahmat said the council needed to think of the party's future and not just the survival of individual leaders.

"The council needs to think of the impact and consequences of their decisions as this is the main party of the Malay community and it has to be an umbrella for all Malaysians."

Azizuddin, of Universiti Utara Malaysia, said the best approach for Najib would be not to do anything controversial during the meeting.

"The best and safe way out is by making peace." – September 9, 2015.

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