

Najib's move to make Hishammuddin the next prime minister?

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Analyst says PM Najib Razak may make Hishammuddin the prime minister after the general election, while Amanah's Salahuddin Ayub hints it may even be before GE14.

PETALING JAYA: Ahmad Zahid Hamidi can no longer sit comfortably in his deputy prime minister's seat now that Hishammuddin Hussein has been appointed special functions minister.

Political analyst Awang Azman Awang Pawi said Hishammuddin's surprise appointment was a clear indication that the post of prime minister was not guaranteed for Zahid, who is also Umno's acting deputy president.

"It's clear that Hishammuddin is another prime ministerial candidate, besides Zahid," he told FMT.

He explained: "In Sarawak, (the late) Adenan Satem was appointed the state's special functions minister before he was made the chief minister.

"The purpose of the position is to help (the minister) adjust to the new situation that is expected to take place after the general election."

Prime Minister Najib Razak in a statement this afternoon, announced that Hishammuddin had been appointed as a minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of special functions with immediate effect.

Hishammuddin, who is also an Umno vice-president, retains his Defence Minister post as well.

Awang also said the appointment was a way for Najib to "test the water", and to gauge how the public and Umno members would react to Hishammuddin's promotion.

Asked if Zahid might lose his positions in the Cabinet and in the party, the Universiti Malaya associate professor said Zahid, as an experienced politician, would be aware of the risk.

"He should be wise enough to interpret the move.

“The prime minister must have a big agenda by making the appointment on the eve of the general election.

“There is also a possibility that he is planning to make Hishammuddin the prime minister after the elections, while Zahid remains the deputy.”

Meanwhile Amanah deputy president Salahuddin Ayub told FMT that Hishammuddin’s appointment might be a sign that Najib was planning his exit move.

“Hishammuddin will take over the Prime Minister post to ensure Umno’s survival in the next general election,” he said.

Salahuddin also pointed to another possibility, which was that Zahid might be booted out of the Cabinet.

“To me, this (Hishammuddin’s appointment) is a ridiculous move. What is the message he (Najib) is sending to Zahid? He clearly stated that the function of the post was to help him with his duties.

“Isn’t the job of a deputy prime minister to help the prime minister? Has Najib lost faith in Zahid? This is a confidence crisis in the government.”

He added that Najib’s move would only disadvantage the public, as the government would now be seen as prioritising the Cabinet’s composition instead of the problems the public was facing.

Zahid was made the deputy prime minister after Najib removed Muhyiddin Yassin from the Cabinet in July, 2015, after the latter publicly criticised his handling of state-owned 1MDB.

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