

'Unwise for Umno to axe Najib after GE'

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By Nigel Aw

Even if the BN wins the next general election but losses more seats, it would still be unwise for Umno to unseat Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak as they did with his predecessor, says prominent author Barry Wain.

This, he said, is because the premier is popular among the people and the ruling coalition and government are dependent on his star power.

"In the event if Najib still wins the election but drops say a dozen seats, he could come under pressure, but it is difficult because Najib is personally popular.

"He is extremely popular, far more popular than Umno, the government and the BN.

NONE"What they have going for them now in terms of electoral appeal is Najib," Wain (left) said at a talk organised by the Foreign Correspondents Club Malaysia (FCCM) in Kuala Lumpur.

Former Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had faced an internal rebellion within Umno even after leading the ruling coalition to a historical victory in 2004 when hit by the disastrous debacle of 2008 - the worst performance since the Barisan Nasional was born in 1972.

Speaking to some 30 FCCM members, the former Wall Street Journal Asia editor, who has resided in Asia for almost 40 years, said another reason Umno should consider retaining Najib is the issue of succession.

"If they (Umno) try to get rid of him, it is not an easy one because the logical person to put, if going by precedent, would be deputy prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

"He is not a terribly attractive figure to the public and is fairly divisive in the public realm," said Wain, who is writer-in-residence at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore.

Right-wing Umno's death knell?

NONEMuhyiddin, (right) he said, is only popular among the right-wing section of Umno and if these elements insist on ousting Najib, the repercussion for the party would be serious.

"It could be that the right-wing is so inward looking ... they are so determined to go their own way and would just put him (Muhyiddin) there regardless, then I think they will get a big shock in the subsequent election," he said.

There aren't many obvious candidates out there who could take over the helm as premier and therefore any attempt to replace the incumbent must be decided with care, he added.

Wain had in 2010 had attracted the Home Ministry's spotlight after his book Malaysian Maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in Turbulence Times was withheld for five months for allegedly "insulting government leaders and Malay rulers".

However, Wain this year had released the second edition of the book with a new chapter to update Mahathir's political activities after retirement and in response to the former premier's memoirs, Doctor in the House.

The new chapter also deals with what Wain described as the "chaotic and primitive approach to the free flow of information" when the Home Ministry initially attempted to censor the book.

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