

**Najib is more Brown than Blair, says Economist**  
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is akin to the dithering former British prime minister Gordon Brown who failed to call for elections while he was still relatively popular, said international weekly Economist.

This was despite Najib's efforts to fashion himself as a progressive reformer in the image of Brown's predecessor Tony Blair, even to the extent of hiring Blair's advisors.

"For years Brown agitated to push his rival aside. When at last he succeeded, Brown blew it by missing the chance to call an early election while he was still relatively popular," said the London-based magazine.

"Rather than winning his own mandate, Brown, unelected and indecisive, watched his authority drain away until he was boxed into calling an election right at the end of his term - which he then lost."

In an article published today, the Economist said Najib was facing a situation similar to Brown's after ousting former Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2009 following unprecedented setback at the last general election where the ruling BN coalition lost its two-thirds parliamentary majority.

It noted that Najib began to "talk up" his chances in winning the coming general election from June last year and the nation has since been on an election footing.

Despite that pollster Merdeka Centre finding Najib still popular - at 64 percent - BN's approval party had however been much lower, argued the magazine.

Najib's option diminishing fast

According to the Economist, winning a simple majority has always looked relatively easy for Najib given Umno's deep pockets and its practice of gerrymandering constituency boundaries.

But Najib faces the "genuinely hard task" of regaining two-thirds majority in the Parliament, and thus risk facing an internal party coup should he failed.

"So now Najib's options are diminishing fast. He is required to call an election by April at the latest.

"In the process he has acquired a reputation for dithering, and now has the regrettable distinction of being Malaysia's second-longest-serving unelected prime minister, just behind his own father, the country's second prime minister," said the magazine.

It added that since Malaysia had been preparing for an election for so long that the resulting partisanship is "poisoning national politics", with Umno and Umno-friendly media attacking any organisation deemed sympathetic to the opposition, such as polls reform movement Bersih and independent news website Malaysiakini.

"All the old canards about these sorts of groups being in the pay of Zionists, America or George Soros, a foreign financier, have been trotted out.

"It is not clear whether such slanders still impress Malaysia's voters, especially its Muslims. They are certainly a sign of desperation," said the Economist.

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