

## **Can Najib survive as prime minister?**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**January 15, 2013**

**By Liew Chin Tong**

COMMENT While the nation awaits the dissolution of Parliament, a new question emerges - can Najib Abdul Razak survive as prime minister?

If Barisan Nasional loses power, Najib of course is not going to survive as the premier. But if BN wins the elections, albeit with a smaller majority, will Umno leaders and members allow Najib to lead the party?

I had a 10-minute brief conversation with Najib on the sidelines of the Shangri-la Dialogue on June 1, 2008 in Singapore before he took the stage at the annual defense conference. He was then deputy prime minister and defence minister.

It was barely three months after the fateful March 8 election which saw the opposition winning five state governments and breaking BN's stranglehold on Parliament's two-thirds majority.

Najib didn't know who I was. I introduced myself as "Bukit Bendera" and he instantly understood that I was a DAP MP.

What Najib told me

Without being prompted or perhaps being defensive, Najib said three things in that brief conversation. First, that he had nothing to do with the Altantuya (Shariibuu) case. Second, that he was not a racist and had many non-Malay friends. And, third, that he wanted BN to start thinking about how to cooperate with the 'opposition' state governments.

I shared with friends who were close to the Umno establishment and familiar with Najib's thinking. One of them immediately said that it seemed that Najib was highly troubled by the Altantuya case, so much so that he had to mention it and be defensive about it when talking to a stranger during a first meeting.

That remark left a lasting impression on me.

Assisted by Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Muhyiddin Yassin, Najib staged a party 'coup' against then-prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. First, on Sept 17, 2008 Najib was given the coveted finance portfolio and then on Sept 28 the same year he managed to 'convince' Abdullah to retire in the subsequent year.

Najib took over the reins of government on April 3, 2009.

Elegant silence

The re-emergence of the Altantunya case in the form of the various accusations made by carpet trader Deepak Jaikishan since late November 2012 during and after the Umno general assembly is perhaps more than what meets the eyes.

Nearly two months since the Deepak accusation first surfaced, Najib and his wife Rosmah Mansor have maintained an 'elegant silence', imitating Abdullah's style of avoiding real issues.

Undercurrents in Umno have always existed. But somehow it is more visible recently. The party is probably troubled by the fact that Najib is no game-changer in winning extra Malay support for Umno while at the same time failing in getting non-Malay support through his 1Malaysia slogan.

Perhaps he may not be a racist in a vulgar way but he was unable to stem the racial campaigns by Umno, Perkasa and Utusan Malaysia. His attempt to "work with the opposition state governments" did not happen at all, especially after the malicious takeover of the Perak state government in February 2009.

Najib's various alphabet soups delivered very little policy outcomes in real life and his attempt to stamp his mark on Umno by having "winnable candidates" backfired on him.

After vacillating on when to dissolve parliament for the last three years, the immediate question now is will there be a person by the name of Najib leading BN into the next election?

- The Rocket

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