

## **Najib invokes 7th century battle in polls warning**

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**By Daniel Ten Kate, Bloomberg**

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak urged party members four months ago to learn from the seventh century Battle of Uhud, in which Prophet Mohammad's army was defeated by the Meccans because his archers didn't obey orders.

Now, with elections just weeks away and facing an invigorated opposition, party leaders are amplifying Najib's message: After ill-discipline and sabotage cost the ruling coalition its two-thirds majority in the 2008 election, this time round it could end their 55-year hold on power.

The 13-party governing alliance plans to announce candidates a week before nomination day, a break from past elections when nominees were declared 48 hours in advance, to allow enough time to purge troublemakers, said Khairy Jamaluddin, son-in-law of former prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Infighting five years ago produced a flood of spoiled ballots, contributing to the coalition's narrowest election win since independence in 1957 and Abdullah's resignation, he said.

"Because of the number of marginal seats, seats with small majorities, it is a serious matter where a couple hundred spoiled votes can make a difference," Khairy, who heads the youth wing of Najib's United Malays National Organisation (Umno), said in an interview.

"In a close contest, even 10 to 20 seats are meaningful in a way that they could decide the election."

Stocks lag

The prime minister dissolved parliament on Wednesday, paving the way for the Election Commission to schedule a vote within 60 days.

Najib told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday that he's "cautiously optimistic" about winning "big" with a two-thirds majority in parliament.

Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim also said he was "cautiously optimistic" about his coalition's prospects in an interview with Bloomberg Television's Susan Li.

Brokerages from RHB Investment Bank Bhd to Citigroup Inc expect a closer election result than in 2008, unsettling investors.

The FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI Index has fallen 0.2 percent this year, lagging behind benchmarks in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. The ringgit has dropped 0.6 percent against the dollar in that time.

Party leaders handpick all 222 candidates standing for parliament, a process that risks

resentment from members who are passed over. Rejected local leaders may encourage supporters to spoil ballots, withhold campaign funds, refrain from campaigning for the party's chosen candidate or run as independents.

"We have to work hard" and "make sure we minimize all internal problems within the party," Najib said, after meeting leaders of his coalition to discuss candidates today. 'Insidious opposition'

While difficult to quantify, measures put in place since the last election will lessen the risk that sabotage will hurt the Umno-led Barisan Nasional coalition this time, according to Ooi Kee Beng, deputy director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore.

"Any list of this type is going to leave a lot of people unhappy, and this is more so in Umno than other parties," he said by phone.

"If something happens from the top that is not popular further down, then you do get silent and rather insidious opposition."

Najib plans to pick candidates that appeal to the wider public instead of those who are only popular within the party, Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor, secretary-general of Barisan Nasional, said in a March 20 interview in Kuala Lumpur.

"If all of us are united, no one can penetrate us," said Tengku Adnan, who is also an Umno member.

Najib invoked the Battle of Uhud at Umno's annual assembly in November to underscore the need for organisational discipline.

"It is the cornerstone of factors that will determine the success or failure of an organization to achieve the desired goals," Najib said, according to a transcript. "In the military field, it can determine victory or defeat."

In the battle, Mohammad's archers disobeyed his orders and left their positions to look for spoils in the Meccan camp after an initial onslaught, which allowed his opponents to regroup and initiate a surprise attack.