

Will sixth PM survive his sixth year in office?

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COMMENT Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak appears to be in a precarious position.

His list of woes is long - 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) in the roast pit, Rosmah Mansor in Seri Perdana, Sirul Azhar Umar in Australia, Anwar Ibrahim in Sungai Buloh, brothers on the opposite side and Dr Mahathir Mohamad lurking in the shadows.

With such baggage on his shoulders, speculation is rife on whether the sixth prime minister will complete his sixth year in office.

And there is also news of his cabinet having turned its back on him.

This is from a report that his ministers have purportedly rejected the proposal to inject RM3 billion into the ailing government-owned investment fund, which is Najib's brainchild.

On Thursday, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), headed by Umno lawmaker Nur Jazlan Mohamed, urged the National Audit Department to number crunch 1MDB.

Analysing the undercurrents, one of his chief critics said if the cabinet had indeed shot down the proposal, the action "could be seen as signalling that Najib no longer holds sway, at least not on the issue of 1MDB."

"This is a huge setback for him. I would not, at this point, speculate that there is an emerging revolt against his leadership," noted veteran newsman Abdul Kadir Jasin in his blog.

"1MDB is his creation. He is the chairperson of its advisory board. The company is owned by the Finance Ministry and Najib is also its minister.

"This could add further burden on the already beleaguered prime minister. Only weeks ago he gloated in a special TV3 interview about the soundness of 1MDB's investment," he added.

On the family front, Najib's siblings issued a statement expressing concern that reports about the prime minister's wealth is tainting their late father Abdul Razak Hussein's reputation.

The four younger brothers stressed that the country's second prime minister was a frugal man, which even veteran opposition leader Lim Kit Siang has attested to.

The statement came hours after Rosmah drew flak for revealing that it cost her a whopping RM1,200 to dye her hair.

This came hot in the heels of the Prime Minister's Office, which in a response to The New York Times last month, had attributed Najib and his wife's lavish expenditure to, among others, his inheritance.

Last-ditch attempt

And prior to the family clash, Sirul, a former police commando, claimed that he was acting under orders and threatened to reveal all with regard to the murder of Mongolian woman Altantuya unfavorable.

The 2006 murder saw Najib implicated after his close associate, political analyst Abdul Razak Baginda was charged with abetting the murder of his ex-lover.

Razak Baginda was found not guilty and the police cleared Najib, who was then deputy premier, of any involvement in the grisly murder, committed by two of his former bodyguards.

Despite this, the spectre of Altantuya continues to haunt Najib. And the latter added fuel to the furore when he dismissed Sirul's claims as "utter rubbish".

So against this unfavourable backdrop, observers are asking if current number two Muhyiddin Yassin is preparing himself for the position of a seat-warmer prime minister.

Questions also abound as to whether the Umno division leaders meeting to show solidarity with Najib on March 8, is a last-ditch attempt by the prime minister to hold onto power.

The meeting will be held a day after the opposition planned mammoth rally to call on Najib to step down.

If not handled properly, the 'solidarity' meeting could backfire and spell Najib's demise. Umno leaders said they plan to ask their boss uncomfortable questions.

And yes, that include 1MDB, Rosmah, Sirul, Anwar, the Razak brothers and Mahathir.