

For BN leaders, Najib is the only choice

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COMMENT In the morning, Kelantan Umno gave its unwavering support for the implementation of Islamic law in the state, often referred to as 'Serambi Mekkah' or the porch of Mecca. In the evening, the leaders of BN component parties pledged their undivided support for Umno president Najib Abdul Razak, perhaps hoping that he would derail the hudud bill.

Both PAS and Umno have lost their support among the non-Malays, especially the Chinese electorate, and therefore a consolidation of power is in the making along religious lines in preparation for a concocted 'us versus them' battle.

It is an open secret that Najib is under siege from forces within Umno, especially the hardliners, who view his leadership to be in philosophical contradiction with their aspirations.

Following the last two general elections, Umno has been veering to the right much to the concern of its coalition partners.

Having failed to perform, parties like MCA, Gerakan and MIC have little or no clout. The antics of some Umno leaders, such as the recent call to boycott Chinese traders, has further dented MCA and Gerakan's reputations.

Though Najib himself failed to make an unequivocal stand on the issue, the component parties know that the prime minister is cast in a different mould.

His policies have been more inclusive and to his credit, Najib had attempted to push the right buttons. He had even tried his hands in beating the Chinese drum and scaling the stairs to the Batu Caves temple on Thaipusam. Allocations for the minority communities were forked out in the tens of millions.

But alas, the rot was too far gone and the ruling coalition, which has been suffering from a perception crisis, could not be rescued from being nudged closer to the edge of defeat in the last polls.

This infuriated Umno.

Living on borrowed time

Granted, Najib himself has too much baggage and unlike his predecessors, one of the biggest albatrosses around his neck happens to be his wife.

Since then, speculation had been rife that the prime minister is living on borrowed time.

So what's next? Muhyiddin Yassin as number one?

To many, that is an unsettling thought, which borders on a nightmare. The deputy prime minister is viewed with caution and widely regarded as an ultra Malay.

Behind closed doors, non-Umno leaders in BN would whisper that backing Muhyiddin over Najib is akin to jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

Lest we forget, Muhyiddin (left) had disagreed with Najib - who declared himself Malaysian first - arguing that while he was Malaysian at heart, he was definitely Malay first.

Muhyiddin said he would be shunned by the Malays if he were to say that he is Malaysian first and Malay second.

His actions on the controversial novel 'Interlok' had also sent a strong message as to where his sentiments are anchored.

In this context, it comes as no surprise that BN leaders would rather walk with Najib than run with Muhyiddin.

Even veteran newsman A Kadir Jasin, a staunch critic of Najib, acknowledged this.

"For the non-Malay based parties in BN, they have greater confidence in Najib than Muhyiddin," he told Malaysiakini.

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