

'Najib buying time, dodges challenge'

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By Norman Goh

Postponing the Umno election is an attempt by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to cling on to power in the face of attacks, according to analysts.

James Chin said the 18-month postponement does not come as a surprise since Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his faction wanted to field a challenger for the Umno president post.

"It shows Najib is still in control of the party machinery at the top level and can move to delay party polls.

"This means if Mahathir and gang cannot reverse the decision then Najib will survive until the end of this year at least," he told Malaysiakini.

In view of this, Chin (photo), who heads University of Tasmania's Asian Institute, said forced resignation is the sole option left for the prime minister's rivals.

"It also tells me Najib has the majority support among Umno supreme council members and probably among division leaders.

"This is a significant setback for Mahathir and gang," he added.

This evening, the Umno supreme council unanimously agreed to defer the polls, which was due next year.

Move may backfire

Meanwhile, Penang Institute's Wong Chin Huat (photo) said the main justification for the postponement is to hold the general election first.

"If he wins, he will shine but if he doesn't, Najib will be forced out by the party. The postponement is wishful thinking, Mahathir may not play to Najib's tune.

"Mahathir will ignore his move and continue to slam Najib out," he added.

Therefore, Wong said the prime minister's calculation to buy time could be counter productive.

He pointed out Najib's opponents might now double their efforts to oust him.

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