

Najib's approval ratings soar to 68%
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The proportion of Malaysians satisfied with Najib Razak's performance as prime minister stands at 68 percent after 12 months in office as the sixth premier, reports The Malaysian Insider quoting the Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research survey.

His approval rating was a dismal 44 per cent when he took over as the economy was slipping into unforgiving negative territory, and he seemed vulnerable as he was pelted by bad news everywhere he turned.

This was contained in a summary of the survey, which polled 883 registered voters in West Malaysia between March 11 and 27, with the questions touching on the direction of the country, public satisfaction with the prime minister, and perception on some of his key initiatives, which was obtained by The Malaysian Insider and was posted on the news portal on Friday.

The latest rating was the highest since the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research began tracking his approval ratings in April 2009, the month he succeeded Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in Putrajaya, it said.

The pollster noted that since June 2009, satisfaction levels regarding Najib's performance as premier has hovered in the 65 percent range, plummeting sharply once to 56 percent in September last year, in the wake of the cow head protest by mainly Umno members against the construction of a Hindu temple in Shah Alam and the death of DAP aide, Teoh Beng Hock, while in custody of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

In the latest survey, 68 percent of the respondents said that they were satisfied with the prime minister's performance.

This upward trend occurred despite issues that erupted recently, such as the 'Allah' controversy and subsequent attacks on places of worship.

PM yet to win over Chinese

According to the survey, Najib's improved rating was also the result of a recuperating economy, along with an opposition which has been troubled by defections and infighting.

Some 74 percent of Malays polled were satisfied with Najib's performance, while 77 per cent of Indians fell into the same category, indicating perhaps that the minority community has been won over by the PM's symbolic gestures, including visiting Batu Caves during Thaipusam and his pledge to uplift the economic status of the Indian community.

Najib has in the last 12 months bypassed the MIC and gone directly to Indian NGOs and the community on a charm offensive.

But the survey showed that Najib and the Barisan Nasional have yet to win over the Chinese.

Slightly over 50 percent of the Malaysian Chinese polled gave him the thumbs up. The community has been the target of attacks by Perkasa, a Malay NGO, and right-wing elements in Umno who have tried to picture the Chinese as a threat to Malay political

dominance.

Sixty-six per cent of Chinese polled held negative sentiments towards Umno.

In the summary of the survey, Ibrahim Suffian of the Merdeka Center cautioned that a high approval rating should not be misconstrued as electoral support, but rather agreement with the intentions and stated policies of the PM.

For example, he noted that although 74 percent of Malays were satisfied with Najib's first year in office, based on the "right versus wrong track question" (a proxy for ballot type of question), the Merdeka Center estimates that between 55 and 57 percent of the Malay electorate would vote for Barisan Nasional.

Indians back Najib most

Among the other key findings of the survey are:

- * More Malaysians placed their trust in Najib (31 percent) than in Umno (22 percent). Of all the major races, Indians placed the highest trust in Najib (51 percent) compared with Umno (13 percent) while the Chinese believed in the PM (46 percent) rather than the ruling party (6 percent).

- * Some 61 per cent of Malaysians polled do not agree with the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST). The administration recently announced that it was delaying the introduction of the GST to obtain more feedback from the public but the opposition dismissed the explanation, pointing that the government's flip-flop was the result of fear of a voter backlash.

- * Just under 60 percent of Malaysians surveyed do not support the removal of subsidies.

- * Most Malaysians view Najib as approachable (80 percent).

Ibrahim noted that though the findings of the survey indicated that Najib was in a stronger position than 12 months ago, there were a couple of provisos.

"Translating this approval into electoral support, however, requires delivering tangible proof that the steps taken are working and that the nation is on its way towards reaching the goals spelt out by the PM," he noted in the summary.

The Malaysian public expect Najib to deliver on his promises as soon as possible, preferably within the next one or two years.

- Bernama