

**Possible snap election by September?**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**July 03, 2010**

The federal government's sudden decision to increase constituency allocations has sparked speculation that they might call for snap polls soon.

Political scholar James Chin believes that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak might even call for it before September this year, soon after announcing the second quarter economic performance.

NONE "It will be sometimes before September because Najib (right) needs (the backing of) a strong growth from second quarter," said Chin, who currently teaches at a private university.

"If (the election is held) next year, then Najib cannot control the economy," he added.

He added that the danger Najib may face next year is a possible second dip in the global economy.

The Najib's economic reforms, including subsidy cuts and the goods and services tax (GST) the tabling which have been delayed due to strong protest, also triggered speculation that the prime minister will seek an early mandate to enable him to continue with his plan.

"GST will create more trouble for them (the BN). The subsidies issue can still be mitigated through cash (returns)," Chin told Malaysiakini.

Out with the old

Najib will also need the election in order to put his own men in government to prop up his agenda, he said.

"The (current) Umno warlords were elected during the 2008 election and most of them were chosen by (former Prime Minister) Abdullah Badawi and (his son- in-law) Khairy Jamaluddin," Chin said.

"So, for Najib to control the party, the only way is to put his (own) people in."

Chin believes Najib is also confident that the BN can win back the parliamentary two-thirds majority if polls are held before September.

NONE The premier's confidence is backed by belief that his cash injection into the economy, his 1Malaysia concept to win non-Malay support while his promise of continued affirmative action to maintain Malay support will favour him.

Also working in his favour is the sodomy charge that is hamstringing his main rival Pakatan Rakyat's Anwar Ibrahim (left) from providing the Opposition with effective leadership, while the internal feud in Selangor and the constant defections help weaken it.

Another analyst Tang Ah Chai, currently the chief executive of Kuala Lumpur Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, concurs with Chin.

"This is the best time among the bad (ones)," he said.

He ,however ,believes that the earliest should be September as this will allow the Election Commission the time it required for the necessary preparations.

Tang also pointed out that there are no new controversies besides those already raised before, and that will favour the BN.

He also believes the reversal of the sports betting decision is an indicator of impending polls.

Umno assembly first

Not all observers believe in the speculation of early polls, one such is Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, professor of social anthropology in University Kebangsaan Malaya.

NONE"The Umno annual assembly will only be held in October, so it is impossible for polls to be held before the meeting. They will have to stabilise internally first," he said.

He also observed that opposition newspapers like Harakah and Siasah are the ones constantly reporting on such speculation, while the mainstream papers like Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian seldom touch on it.

He concluded that the BN will let their current term run at least 4 years, putting polls at the beginning of 2013.

Phoon Weng Keong, an active political commentator in the Chinese press with a doctorate in politics, also thinks a snap poll in 3 to 5 months is unlikely.

"You have to create the (good) feelings first. The effect will not be immediately felt after you give the allocations, it needs time," he said.

Waiting for Sarawak

Another main factor affecting the timing of polls is the Sarawak state election, which must be held by mid 2011. However, the recent loss in the Sibu by-election has left the BN in no hurry to hold state polls.

NONESome commentators speculate that Sarawak Chief Minister Taib Mahmud, who has occupied the seat for almost 30 years, is hoping for both state and national elections to be concurrent to keep him from being a sole and easy target for Opposition attacks (above) during campaigning.

Merdeka Centre director Ibrahim Suffian also speculates that the Sarawak poll will come first to test the waters.

"The Sarawak state election might be held sometime after Hari Raya and then the national election will be held a few months later," he said.

However, he also agreed that a strong second-quarter growth in the economy may affect the timing.

He added that pensions enjoyed by MPs may also have some impact, as this benefit is only

available after a minimum service of 3 years.

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