

Analysts: BN's double whammy a turning point
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BN's victories in two by-elections yesterday have delivered a major boost to its prospects in national polls expected to be held next year.

The victories in Batu Sapi and Galas could help Prime Minister Najib Razak implement reforms that have failed to garner universal backing from his party.

bridget welsh "This double whammy is a turning point for the BN. There's no question it's the first positive electoral news Najib's has had since he came to office," said political analyst Bridget Welsh (right) from the Singapore Management University.

Tian Chua, strategic director of the Pakatan Rakyat, said that the lost both seats, which were vacated due to the deaths of the incumbents, will served as a lesson for the opposition alliance.

"Our defeat is actually based on a lot of local factors. But we concede we have some strategic problems that we must review and improve on," he said.

Meanwhile, PAS vice-president Mahfuz Omar said in a Twitter message after the results were announced, "We accept the defeats and admit that we have weaknesses that we are ready to address."

Chinese voters return

Welsh said the results showed the coalition clawing back support from ethnic Chinese voters who along with ethnic Indians stampeded towards the opposition in 2008 national elections.

NONEThe opposition scored a third of parliamentary seats in those polls, in an unprecedented result that shocked the coalition and helped unseat premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in favour of Najib who was appointed leader last year.

Welsh attributed the swing to Najib's '1Malaysia' campaign which has sought to foster unity in multicultural Malaysia, and address minorities' concerns they are losing out to majority Muslim Malays.

National polls do not have to be called until 2013 but the strong result is seen as increasing the likelihood Najib will go to the people next year.

"They will want to build on this momentum," Welsh said.

She said the BN campaign had avoided the bitter infighting that has undermined its efforts in previous by-elections, helping the opposition win eight of the 11 other special votes held since 2008.

BN recovers from Sibu defeat

Analysts said the double win signalled that Najib was making good on his pledge to revive a coalition hit by record losses in 2008 polls.

It would also enable him to seek a mandate to restructure the economy to woo investment which has been lured away by faster reforming neighbours such as Indonesia.

"The results indicate that BN has recovered some of its momentum and is a positive development for Najib going ahead," said James Chin, professor of political science at Monash University in Malaysia.

"These victories mean that Najib has every incentive to call for general elections as soon as possible now that he has the momentum."

Najib has introduced several economic reforms since taking power last year but analysts say he must tackle issues such as implementing major subsidy cuts and a goods and tax services to boost economic competitiveness.

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