

Snap polls: Why it's unlikely to happen
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Given the rumours of possible crossovers, some commentators have speculated that a snap election is in the offing. Such speculation increased after the Election Commission chairman asked his staff to be ready for yet another election.
MCPX

anwar ibrahim pc 120508 01If Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi maneuvers for a fresh election at the federal level, this must mean one of two things.

Either he has credible intelligence that de facto PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim has the necessary number of crossover members of parliament to form the next government or enough Barisan Nasional MPs have already declared publicly that they have switched over to Pakatan Rakyat.

In the first instance, it would be a pre-emptive strike. In the second, it would be to throw a spanner in the works so that Anwar doesn't get what he wants without a fight.

We've argued in previous podcasts that we think that Anwar is bluffing – that he is aiming for the domino effect to create a self-fulfilling prophecy. So far, we've not seen anything new to change our minds.

abdullah ahmad badawi pm mahathir quits umno pc 190508 02Although there was some talk that the first wave of crossovers would happen by the end of May, so far nothing has happened. Abdullah's recent announcement of goodies for Sabah might also help to stave off some defections.

But let's say that Anwar somehow manages to create the perception that he has the necessary number of MPs, and a jittery Abdullah asks the king to dissolve parliament, there's no guarantee the king will agree.

While the king has never in the past refused to dissolve parliament at the advice of the prime minister, these are unprecedented times. The king might very well decide that having another election so soon after the last one is unnecessarily disruptive to the country. This would be especially so if Abdullah is asking him to dissolve parliament on a pre-emptive basis.

What happens then if enough MPs actually cross over and Anwar calls for a vote of no confidence or directly requests the king to recognise him as the new PM?

percentage of seats in parliament 300408If Anwar is able to get a comfortable majority, say 45 MPs, to defect, he'd have a pretty strong case for being recognised as the next PM. Abdullah, however, might be able to ask for a snap election on the grounds that the mass crossover is a form of electoral fraud. It would put the king in quite a spot and it's hard to tell what he would actually do.

One factor which the king might consider is the racial composition of a Pakatan government. If Anwar only manages to convince Sabah and Sarawak MPs to cross over without any from the peninsula, there would actually be more non-Malay than Malay MPs in Pakatan (many

East Malaysians are bumiputeras but not Malays).

Of course, there's nothing in the constitution that says there needs to be more Malay than non-Malay MPs in the federal government. But having seen the sensitivity over race affect the formation of the state governments in Selangor and Perak, this factor is not something that should be discounted.

Anwar needs Umno defectors too

Knowing Anwar, he would not try to form the government without having at least some Umno crossovers from the peninsula, to increase the number of Malay MPs in Pakatan. In addition, he could propose a Malay-majority cabinet with most of the senior posts going to Malays. This could mitigate the fact that his government actually has more non-Malay than Malay MPs.

Another interesting factor that would affect the likelihood of a snap election being called is the sequence of defections. If Jeffrey Kitingan, PKR's point-man in Sabah, is to be believed, the first wave of crossovers would come from Sabah, followed by the peninsula, and finally by Sarawak.

That's clearly the game plan. That Sabah should be the first to make the move makes sense because Anwar has clearly been focusing on the MPs there. That Sarawak would be the last also makes sense considering the tight hold the chief minister there has on the state. There's no reason for Sarawak to switch over unless it's absolutely convinced that the BN government is about to fall, after witnessing Sabah and Peninsular MPs cross over.

However, there is another scenario that could play out given recent political developments. If Umno implodes – basically descend into an all-out factional war – that might very well be the tipping point for some Peninsular Umno MPs to start crossing over.

The losing or disgruntled faction would have every reason to switch over rather than be cast into political oblivion. By joining Pakatan, they get to become part of the new government. If Peninsular Umno MPs start crossing over, you can be sure Sabah and Sarawak MPs wouldn't be far behind.

If such a scenario were to play out, any move by Abdullah to dissolve parliament would be moot as it would really be game over by then.

Tomorrow - Snap polls: Who would win?

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