

Najib completes the 'Rahman prophecy'
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The anointing of the Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak as the nation's next leader has been hailed as the culmination of a curious prophecy which has "predicted" all its premiers.

Najib is expected to be handed the top job in ruling party elections next March, at which Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has promised to step aside after a disastrous performance in general elections.

His accession would fulfil the "Rahman prophecy", a somewhat tongue-in-cheek phenomenon under which the name of the nation's first leader spells out the first initials of the next five premiers.

The initials follow the sequence R A H M A N - after Tunku Abdul Rahman who became the nation's first prime minister when Malaysia declared independence from Britain in 1957.

Rahman was followed by:

Abdul Razak

Hussein Onn

Mahathir Mohamad

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

Najib Abdul Razak

"The most famous political prophecy in Malaysia, the Rahman prophecy, is now making furious rounds in Malaysian political circles," opposition veteran Lim Kit Siang said in a weekend statement.

Lim, who was first elected to Parliament in 1969, told AFP he first heard of the "prophecy" in the 1970s.

"At the time it was not thought of very seriously, but now it's turning out very serious," he said, referring to his strident criticism of Najib.

A twist in the form of Anwar

Lim said that various quirks in the succession had added credence to the tale, including the appointment of Hussein Onn as the successor to Abdul Razak - Najib Razak's father - as the nation's third premier in 1976.

Abdul Razak's first deputy premier, Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman, was the next in line, but he died in 1973, clearing the way for Hussein Onn to replace him, and ensuring the "prophecy" remained intact.

Another twist was the case of talented finance minister and deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim, who was expected to succeed Dr Mahathir Mohamad but was instead sacked and jailed on sex and corruption charges.

He was replaced as Mahathir's heir by the current premier Abdullah - another "A" and once more ensuring the prophecy held true.

Sceptics quite rightly note inconvenient details such as Najib's official name actually beginning with "Mohamad".

National University of Malaysia political analyst Mohammad Agus Yusoff said the uncanny order of succession is obviously just a coincidence, but an amusing one nevertheless.

"It does not mean the N will eventually be Najib. There are also people who say that the N may stand for Nuar," he said, referring mischievously to the nickname of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar's opposition alliance made huge gains in general elections this year but his plans to topple the government with the help of defecting lawmakers have not come to pass.

Lim light-heartedly speculated that the completion of the "Rahman" sequence may end the reign of the ruling party Umno which has dominated Malaysian politics for half a century.

"After that, it might be the end of Umno rule," he told AFP. "It will be the end of the Umno monopoly and the beginning of a change, hopefully."

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