

**Storm clouds over Najib**  
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Two recent developments have conspired to further jeopardise Najib Razak's position as prime minister.

First, there is the precedent set by the Federal Court's decision in the Perak constitutional crisis - whereby the sultan now has the power to remove a democratically elected leader.

Some argue that this has ramifications that reach the prime minister and the federal government.

Any individual (whether from the opposition or within the ruling party) can now seek the consent of the sultan or the Agong to remove a chief minister or the prime minister by convincing them that the person does not command the confidence of the legislature/parliament.

Second, the latest Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC) report on Malaysia confirms serious doubts among international investors concerning the political stability of Malaysia.



It also raises serious doubts about Prime Minister Najib's (*left*) ability to lead the country through this turbulent times, especially reigning in vested interests within his party, Umno.

This report seriously undermines Najib's position because without economic growth, the Umno/BN patronage machine cannot function, leading to further discontent among the electorate.

In an immediate response, Muhyiddin Yassin, deputy prime minister and education minister and also Umno deputy president, rubbished the report, stating that it was nonsense. Najib, however, has yet to respond.

The PERC report highlights several key problems plaguing Najib's leadership. His strategy of "...trying to be all things to all people..." is ineffective. The PERC report also emphasised that "... a group of elite minorities..." was dominating the national agenda and this has affected Malaysia's attractiveness to investors.

Both these events will only strengthen attempts to topple Najib. There are several reasons why it is possible and likely that Najib will be unhorsed by Umno insiders:

**Nation loses international shine**

1. **The faltering economy:** This will squeeze opportunities for dispensing economic largesse thus angering some groups, particularly the elites within Umno that are lead by Najib and Muhyiddin. This will lead to a fight to control access to patronage.

2. **Najib's liberalisation measures:** Due to Malaysia's declining economic fortunes and burdening deficits, Najib must institute liberalisation measures to boost national competitiveness and which will be used against him by fundamentalists such as Perkasa.

3. **Najib's administrative reforms:** The Government Transformation Programme (GTP) and National Key Results Areas (NKRA), while only having limited impact on government-linked corporations (which control almost 40 to 50 percent of the Malaysian bourse), still allow for greater scrutiny of government decisions - further affecting opportunities for patronage.

4. **Najib's strategy of reaching out to other races:** It is perceived as a sign of weakness among Umno and Malay fundamentalists such as Perkasa.

5. **Progress in opposition-controlled states:** Reform measures in opposition-controlled states (especially Penang) allow the public to see how effective governments can provide better welfare outcomes.

6. **Rising fundamentalism:** Policies of Islamisation and racist indoctrination during the Mahathir regime have created a segment in society that believes that Malay Muslims are the rightful heirs of the country.

Two other key points also suggest that Najib will not last long. The first point - history: It may seem unlikely on the surface that Muhyiddin would challenge Najib but, then again, in Umno politics nothing is impossible when the stakes are so high.

Umno history is littered with betrayal: Mahathir's treatment of his 'heir apparent', Anwar Ibrahim in 1998 and since; how Anwar Ibrahim himself unceremoniously unseated party veteran Ghafar Baba in 1993 through highly dubious methods for the deputy president's post (when both Najib and Muhyiddin were in Anwar's Wawasan team); how two arch enemies, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Musa Hitam joined forces to challenge Mahathir in 1987... the list goes on.



The second point - there is no loyalty in Umno:

While Umno is often described as a feudal party where loyalty is measured on deference to leaders, it is - at the end of the day - a party driven by greed. Just ask Anwar.

### **Fair weather friends fade**

Once heir apparent, his "loyal friends" in Umno treat him today in ways that no politician in Malaysia has ever been treated.

This, however, is a common trend in Umno. Onn Jaafar and Tunku Abdul Rahman - founding fathers of Umno and Malaysia respectively - were totally discredited by Umno once they disagreed with the directions the party was taking.

The key message, once outside Umno, one has no means to dispense patronage and therefore deserve no respect from Umno members.



Umno has grown into a powerful patronage dispensing machine. Members of this elite group are not about to give up their power. Umno is so rotten that even one of its most senior members, Razaleigh, has criticised the party and what it is doing to the country.

In the 2004 election, Umno - as a party - had a simple majority in Parliament as BN decimated the opposition. In the process, non-Malay BN component parties were marginalised - unleashing unprecedented racial and religious bigotry against non-Malay/Muslims.

In the 2008 election, the reverse happened; BN lost its two-thirds majority.

However, Umno's percentage of the vote remained nearly intact (reduced by about 5 percent) but its non-Malay component parties on the peninsular were nearly wiped out with non-Malay votes swinging by about 35 percent among Chinese and by about 50 percent among Indians away from BN.

### **He may not last one term**

Herein lies Najib's immediate problem.

The non-Malay/Muslim BN component parties have blamed Umno for its disappointing performance while Umno has blamed its partners for not delivering their part of the bargain.

Najib has decided to go at it alone in reaching out to the various communities directly as his BN partners are all in disarray (every single one of them have leadership crises).

It is within this context that the tussle between Najib and the other side should be examined.

Najib wants to extend a hand to the other communities (for example, '1Malaysia') which would require some economic, social and political reforms and concessions, while the other side wants to go the other way, become increasingly extreme in response to the perception that the Malay votes will be sufficient to tide Umno through on the peninsular and gain an overall majority with support from East Malaysia.

With non-Malays deserting BN at the 12th general elections and further alienated through recent events, Najib is left vulnerable to the threats from fundamentalists.

Najib will definitely not last a term unless he tames the greedy warlords within his party, Malay fundamentalists and address issues raised in the PERC report.

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