

Will Najib call for snap polls soon?
Malaysianmirror.com
05 November 2010

NEWS ANALYSIS KUALA LUMPUR - Impressive victories by Malaysia's ruling coalition in two by-elections Thursday might embolden Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to call early national polls, amid signs of a fall in support for the opposition.

In the straight fight for the Galas state seat in Kelantan, Barisan Nasional (BN) wrested control from the opposition Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) with a majority of 1,190.

Newly-elected state assemblyman Abdul Aziz Yusoff said voters rejected PAS for failing to improve the people's livelihood. Kelantan Umno liaison head Mustapa Mohamed said BN's success there was also due to its campaign approach.

"There were no insults and slander, nor big-scale ceramah or events," he said. "We took a more small-scale and moderate approach of reaching out to each and every voter."

In the three-way contest for the Batu Sapi parliamentary seat in the state of Sabah, BN retained the post with a majority of 6,359 - up from 3,708 in the 2008 general election.

Its candidate, Linda Tsen Thau Lin won. She is the widow of the late parliamentarian Edmund Chong, whose death on Oct 9 led to the by-election in the BN stronghold. She beat opponents fielded by the opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat and the Sabah Progressive Party.

The BN has now won three of the four by-elections this year. The results are a major morale boost for BN, which has battled to regain public support after clinging on to power despite losing more than one-third of the seats in Parliament in the 2008 general election.

Malaysia's next general elections is not due until mid-2013 but analysts say Najib could call snap polls as early as next year if he believes enough voters approve of his efforts to curb corruption, economic mismanagement and racial discrimination.

"These victories mean that Najib has every incentive to call a general election as soon as possible now that he has the momentum," said Mr James Chin, professor of political science at Monash University in Malaysia.

The results mark a reversal of fortunes for Anwar Ibrahim's opposition alliance, the Pakatan Rakyat, which won eight of the 11 previous by-elections after seizing an unprecedented number of Parliament and state seats in 2008.

Ibrahim Suffian, director of the independent research firm Merdeka Centre, said many voters might have been disappointed with the opposition alliance for being embroiled in infighting and failing to deliver on political promises over the past two years.

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

