

Malaysia PM Confident Of Wooing Back Ethnic Indian Voters
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PUTRAJAYA -- Malaysian Premier Najib Razak on Tuesday expressed confidence that ethnic Indian voters, who had moved away from the ruling coalition in the 2008 general election, would return to its fold as a result of the measures initiated to address their concerns on issues like employment.

However, he was not forthcoming on the possibility of an early election, neither confirming nor denying speculation that he may seek an early mandate, Press Trust of India reports.

But he did point out that the government has a prerogative to decide on when to call an election while expressing confidence that the crucial support of ethnic Indians, which eroded in the 2008 polls, would return to the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition.

Najib, who had fuelled talk of an early election last week by announcing his government's plans to repeal the tough Internal Security Act (ISA), also said it is time for Malaysia to go through a "total transformation", towards a "modern and functioning democracy" balanced with safeguards.

Asked to comment on speculation that he might call for early elections, he just said calculations are involved in such decisions and the government has enough time till 2013.

"We have a Westminster system like in India, where the government of the day has a prerogative to decide (when to call an election)," he told a group of visiting Indian journalists here during a meeting.

"You have to look at the landscape to decide about it. Those are the things that will be in calculation, we still have time for 2013," he said, adding in a lighter vein that "in India you also look at the stars".

In a major speech on the eve of the Independence Day last week, Najib announced that his government would repeal the ISA, the colonial law that gives police powers to detain people for unspecified periods of time, and replace it with anti-terror laws. The announcement was welcomed by pro-reform observers and further fed talks of the possibility of elections being advanced in the country.

Asked whether more reforms are likely to follow, particularly towards ensuring greater media freedom, he said he believes there must be "a total transformation of Malaysia" but democracy should always be supplemented by safeguards.

"We have developed the minds of Malaysians and their value system. Education has resulted in a new generation of Malaysians, a burgeoning middle class and we believe the time is right to move forward not only in economic and social transformation but also towards a dawn of a new Malaysia," Najib said.

"We want a modern and functioning democracy but with safeguards for the country," he said, adding it is a delicate balance between freedom and safeguards.

The major erosion of support from the ethnic Indian voters in the last election might have jolted the ruling coalition, but the Prime Minister believes it was largely an "aberration" and would be rectified with the measures his government has initiated to address the community's concerns.

"They (Malaysian Indians) have been our traditional supporters, ever since 1959, except the 12th general election when Indians in a majority did not vote for the Barisan coalition. I believe it was an aberration and I believe with the measures we have taken, Indians here will realise their future lies with the Barisan Nasional," Najib said.

He said his government had put the concerns of the Indian community a priority, dedicating a special task force to address the problems like employment and provisions of birth certificates.

(Bernama)

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