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# PM hints at early polls

## Najib to gauge the people's mood in Sarawak election

**MELBOURNE:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has not ruled out an early election and says he does not need a mandate at the polls to proceed with key reforms, such as the introduction of a goods and services tax (GST).

Najib has pledged to restore investor confidence by pursuing reforms, including introducing the twice-delayed tax.

In an interview with Reuters here, he said a good showing in the upcoming Sarawak state election would help assess the public mood and, perhaps, provide a pointer to calling an early general election before one is due in 2013. The Barisan Nasional, which he leads, holds 63 of the 71 state seats in Sarawak.

"It's a question of the assessment on the ground, how people are feeling towards the Government, whether we can have a feel-good factor and the people's confidence in the Government and the position of the Opposition," he said.

"I would not rule out anything. It could be early or it could be later. I am still assessing the situation. Sarawak will be part of the assessment, certainly," added Najib, who is making his first official visit to Australia as Prime Minister.

Since taking office in the aftermath of the Barisan's 2008 general election losses, Najib has delivered measures such as approving new bank licences and cutting Malaysia's



**Honoured:  
Najib receiving  
the honorary  
doctorate of  
letters from  
Monash  
University  
Chancellor Dr  
Alan Finkel  
in Melbourne  
yesterday.  
— Bernama**

budget deficit, which hit a 20-year high of 7% in 2009.

Analysts say Najib may be willing to push through reforms, such as the GST, if he obtains a strong mandate at the next general election, which could be held on the back of economic growth following a contraction of 1.7% in 2009.

Najib said the GST, aimed at widening

Malaysia's narrow tax base, could be introduced "slightly later" than this year. The GST would replace the sales tax from 2011 and generate about RM8.8bil in revenue annually.

"So far, the reports on the ground are quite encouraging but we cannot take the threat lightly that the Opposition will be more determined this time to try to make inroads in Sarawak."