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So when will Najib call the election?

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ate last month, Bloomberg carried a report saying that the ringgit was the strongest among Asian currencies and investors were flocking back to Malaysia despite the 1MDB issue. It went on to say that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was set to call an early election to "cement his hold on power".

But call early polls he did not, despite the glowing report.

When the story broke, I sought the views of several analysts. One of them was Asrul Hadi Abdulah Sani, from public policy consulting firm BowerGroupAsia.

"If I were Najib, I would call the election now because the economy is making the right sounds and the opposition is in disarray," he said.

I don't know about the economy bit, but as for the state of the opposition then, Asrul was spot on.

However, Dr Oh Ei Sun had a different take on the matter.

"The prime minister does not need an early election to consolidate his grip on power, which is already considerable," said Oh, who was Najib's former political secretary. He is now a senior fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

He added that the longer the wait, the "high-



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er Najib's chances of winning as the opposition would have exhausted their resources by then".

These remarks were made last month. Since then, it seems that the opposition has sorted out its problems and emerged as a united Pakatan Harapan. Well, that's the image being portrayed, anyway.

And judging by the attacks on the opposition pact by the Barisan Nasional, one gets the feeling that the ruling coalition is concerned about the latest development and is taking the "unity" of Pakatan Harapan seriously.

Hence, if there was such a window of opportunity for Najib to call snap polls, did he miss it?

Can it be said that the prime minister had the opportunity but hesitated and subsequently, lost it?

Now we have his deputy, Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, saying that the election will not be held before or in September.

Based on that, the many political pundits among the rakyat are predicting that the BN will use next month's SEA Games and 60th Merdeka celebrations to whip up the spirit of patriotism and turn it into support for the ruling coalition.

And a good showing by our contingent at the games will provide that feel-good factor.

But it's not that simple. Najib would have to take other factors into consideration — for instance, the rising cost of living. Needless to say,

many Malaysians are angry and frustrated with the high prices of goods and services, not to mention their stagnant income.

So, it's a no-brainer that the BN will not call the election now.

Most analysts opined that the 1MDB issue will not have a significant impact on the outcome of the 14th general election, especially in the Malay heartland. But any new revelations and allegations that may arise from ongoing investigations overseas can still be disturbing for the BN.

So, too, are the legal proceedings of two French nationals on corruption charges over alleged kick-backs from the 2002 sale of two Scorpene-class submarines to Malaysia. More charges arising from this case can be sticky for the BN.

Then, there's the lesson from the UK. Recall that British Prime Minister Theresa May was riding high when she called snap polls early last month. We know how that turned out to be — instead of winning more seats, it lost its parliamentary majority.

Nevertheless, the chances of the BN retaining power are bright. But surely Najib would want to avoid the predicament faced by May. ■

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