

# Analysts divided over impact of Najib's absence

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**PETALING JAYA:** Datuk Seri Najib Razak may have played a pivotal role in Barisan Nasional's previous election campaigns, but analysts are divided on whether the former premier's absence would affect the coalition's upcoming electoral outing.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia political analyst Suffian Mansor said it was the Najib factor that contributed to Barisan's two-thirds majority victories in the Melaka and Johor state polls, as Pakatan was at a weak position then following the Sheraton Move in 2020.

"Pakatan couldn't manoeuvre in both these elections, and support was divided after the Sheraton Move," he said.

However, Suffian said the situation is different now as Barisan and Pakatan are the government of the day, and the results of the Melaka and Johor state polls were not a sure measure.

"Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi will have to show his leadership to recover Barisan support in the seats contested by the coalition," he added, referring to the Barisan chairman and Umno president.

Universiti Malaya socio-political analyst Dr Awang Azman Awang Pawi said that with Najib behind bars, more public attention would be given to the performance of the seven-month-old unity government led by Pakatan and Barisan.

"The Barisan-Pakatan performance will be an indication of the future of the coalition's cooperation," he said.



**Turning out for Bossku:** Najib's popularity among Barisan supporters is well documented, with the ex-PM often mobbed by supporters - like this 2019 instance on a walkabout in Beranang, Selangor.

Awang Azman said it is important for Barisan to take on the state polls as a team where every leader has a role to play.

"For example, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim should focus on economic recovery and his deputy (Ahmad Zahid) on explaining the Barisan and Pakatan cooperation to the grassroots.

"(Umno vice-president) Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani is good on economic issues, while Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz can focus on foreign investments to convince fence-sitters and new voters," he added.

Political analyst Dr Sivamurugan Pandian said the Najib factor

played a prominent role in the previous state elections because of the former premier's "aura-personality."

"He was an election strategist and managed to mediate through fragmented politics within the party.

"Now, he can still play that role by advising from prison and ensuring the party is intact to address concerns of members and voters," he said.

Sivamurugan also said Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan complements Anwar's character because the Defence Minister managed the party election machinery during GE15 quite well.

"This combination will be good

for Barisan and Pakatan without denying Ahmad Zahid's presence as the Umno president and Barisan chairman," said Sivamurugan.

Azmi Hassan, a senior fellow at the Nusantara Academy for Strategic Research, said it is crucial for Barisan to find a new icon to fill the sizeable gap left by Najib.

"As far as I am concerned, no one can step into Najib's shoes. Even Ahmad Zahid or Mohamad Hasan failed to attract voters the way Najib did.

"Within Umno, the party needs an icon.

"There is no problem with Pakatan because the coalition has the Prime Minister, two Mentri

Besar and a Chief Minister," he said.

Azmi also said it is important for other leaders such as Johari, Tengku Zafrul and Umno youth chief Dr Akmal Saleh to play a more significant role in the state polls.

"Umno needs leaders who are not always with the president, deputy president or the supreme council.

"To attract Malay votes, these particular three leaders can play a critical role in the upcoming state polls," he added.

A special meeting will be convened by the Election Commission today to decide on the nomination and polling dates, electoral roll and other preparations for the six state polls.

Kelantan was the first to dissolve its state assembly on June 22, followed by Selangor the following day.

Kedah, Penang and Terengganu dissolved their state assemblies on June 28 and Negri Sembilan on July 1.