

Zahid brushes aside Umno dry run, insists BN will win big
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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 2 — Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi dismissed the findings of a recent polls dry run conducted by his own party which showed Barisan Nasional (BN) could lose the Negri Sembilan and Perak state governments to the opposition.

He said BN would in fact win a bigger majority due to stronger support, not only from the Malays but from the other races as well.

“This will be proven at the next general election,” he told reporters at his office here today.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also the defence minister, was responding to a report by *The Malaysian Insider* yesterday that said the ruling coalition will lose the two states unless component parties put popular faces and ensure the grassroots machinery garners support from voters.

The Malaysian Insider understands that the Umno election dry run also showed that the BN fortress of Johor could see up to 15 out of the 56 state seats go to its political opponents Pakatan Rakyat (PR), something unheard before Election 2008 when the ruling coalition lost six seats.

It is also learnt that Perlis, where BN holds 14 of the 15 state seats, could see several state and one of the three federal seats going to PR due to anger over Putrajaya putting Wahhabi preachers including state mufti Dr Juanda Jaya on a terror watch list.

An upcoming Umno leader revealed that the dry run showed Umno could only win 27 seats in the 59-seat Perak state assembly despite BN ruling the state since February 2009 after a series of defections toppled the state PR government.

In June, the state Umno was confident of getting 33 seats, with Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir dismissing *The Malaysian Insider's* report that victory is only assured if right candidates are picked.

It was learnt that several Perak Umno divisional leaders were loath to campaign or register new voters unless they were certain about the likely candidates for the next general election.

Umno contested 34 seats in the 59-seat state assembly in Election 2008, winning 27 with one seat won by the MCA, giving the Silver State to PR, which took 31 seats.

In Negri Sembilan, BN won 21 of the 36 state seats, with the remainder 15 going to PR, which has expressed confidence of taking the state.

The parties that make up PR — DAP, PKR and PAS — won four more states and 82 parliament seats in Election 2008 but later lost Perak to BN. However, they are gunning to win more states and hope to whittle BN's federal majority in the next general election.

Many analysts and opposition politicians expect elections within a year, with some saying it could be held as early as November, after the budget is tabled and before the Umno general assembly.

But Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak will have to first overcome criticisms against his government's crackdown on the Bersih electoral reforms rally last month, where nearly 1,700 were held briefly, others injured and one died of a heart attack.

Ahmad Zahid was confident Umno would perform better than it did at the 2008 general election "because voters have seen that Pakatan Rakyat is not a viable alternative".

"Voters who voted for the opposition at the 12th general election thought they will have a better government.

"Now they realise it's actually not true," he said.

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