

Najib Says Polls After Economic Reforms Produce Results
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak hopes that the general election will be "soon" but adds that the government still has to show that its economic reforms are producing real results before he is ready to go to the ballot box.

In an interview published by the Wall Street Journal Friday, Najib said essentially "it's a call you have to make on the basis of a feel-good factor, and that's when you press the button. But of course at the end of the day it's a rather intuitive decision.

"You can have all the polling numbers but you must have the sense that this is the right time. I hope it will be the right time soon enough, but we still have to deliver on our promises and it's important for people to have the feeling that the reforms we have promised will actually benefit them."

In the interview, Najib was reported to have acknowledged that the deteriorating global economic environment, especially the persistent debt crisis in Europe, could complicate his decision about when to call for an election.

The report said that a worsening economic outlook could encourage Najib to call an election sooner than planned.

"But so far we are still quite comfortable because our exposure to the EU in terms of total trade is only about 9.0 per cent, so we are less vulnerable," he said.

"But a euro-zone collapse or some other catastrophe there will affect the whole world."

The last general election was held on March 8, 2008 and the current term only ends in March 2013.

Najib also said that both the government and opposition camps would step up their race to claim the centre-ground of Malaysian politics in the coming months.

Referring to the acquittal verdict on opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, he said once it was released, "all of the tension surrounding the trial suddenly fell away and people suddenly realised there are more important things than just the Anwar issue."

"What is important now is that we move forward," he said, and cited measures like making elections more transparent ahead of the next polls.

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