

Najib to unveil 'raft of reforms' to revive drifting administration
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By Jahabar Sadiq

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 15 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak is to announce a "raft of reforms" centred on security and press laws tonight, in a bid to jump-start his 29-month administration that critics say has been stalling lately.

The prime minister is to address the nation in a special live telecast at 8.45pm in conjunction with Malaysia Day tomorrow after the weekly Cabinet meeting yesterday decided that he must tell Malaysians about reforms for the Internal Security Act (ISA) and several laws related to the media.

"The prime minister has been refining his speech and it covers a raft of reforms that he spoke about when he took office in 2009," an official told The Malaysian Insider, saying he could not elaborate any further.

Several Cabinet ministers confirmed that Najib (picture) will make big announcements as disclosed by Information, Communication and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Rais Yatim last night but declined to reveal the nature of the speech.

"Only a few Cabinet ministers were consulted and all are sworn to secrecy," one of them told The Malaysian Insider, saying Najib said to them to "expect good things".

Another minister said Najib told the Cabinet that he would make a special announcement but did not elaborate at the weekly meeting.

The Malaysian Insider understands that Najib's speech is the start of an election push which will definitely not be held this year although there was speculation of snap polls in November.

On Monday, The Malaysian Insider reported that Najib could dismantle the ISA as early as this week as he seeks to gain new momentum ahead of a general election expected within a year. He has hardly used the ISA and has freed 13 from the law that allows detention without trial.

Najib came to power in April 2009 with the promise of reviewing the security law but the prime minister, whose reform credentials are seriously in question after a series of decision flip-flops, is considering going all the way by abolishing the law that allows detention without trial.

Despite resistance from within the government, Najib's advisers are understood to have told the PM that he needs to make a drastic move to win back middle Malaysia.

In recent days, the idea of abolishing the ISA has also been floated by the PM's advisers through reports in the Singapore Straits Times and international news service Reuters.

"The move is aimed at finding a better balance between civil liberties and national security which has been a key pledge of the government, and it is important that we get this done

before the next general election," a source told Reuters on Tuesday.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said this week Najib should push back the election timetable and the influential former prime minister's views has found support among Cabinet and senior government leaders who want the Barisan Nasional (BN) government to regain greater support.

"It's not this year and perhaps not even in the first quarter of next year. The feeling is that the ground is poisonous and the announced reforms could help Najib regain some standing," a source told The Malaysian Insider.

The latest survey from local pollster Merdeka Center showed that Najib's popularity slid to 59 per cent this August from the highest of 79 per cent in May 2010, fuelled by rising concerns over the surge in living costs and his government's handling of the July 9 Bersih 2.0 rally.

The Bersih 2.0 rally and spike in living costs this year are similar to events in 2007 that eventually led to BN's loss of its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and four states in Election 2008 to three opposition parties that later organised themselves into a pact called Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

That led to Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi losing his job in 2009 in favour of Najib who became the country's sixth prime minister after more than 30 years in government. Najib's father, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, was the country's second prime minister.

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