

Najib to hit the ground weekly ahead of GE13
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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 25 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak has signalled to his Cabinet that the next general election is near, telling them yesterday he intends to hit the ground weekly from Friday to Sunday after the Hari Raya Aidilfitri break to meet people and assess the political landscape.

Sources told The Malaysian Insider that the prime minister wants the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) prepared for the polls, which could be held anytime within the next six months, although a major worry is that a number of divisions "have yet to get their act together".

"The prime minister told the Cabinet his schedule is simple. Monday to Friday in the office, Thursday for political work and Friday to Sunday on the ground meeting people and getting feedback," a source told The Malaysian Insider.

Najib (picture), who is finance minister, chairs a weekly economic council meeting every Mondays and the Cabinet meeting on Wednesdays. It is learnt that he might even skip the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) scheduled for October 28 to 30 in Perth, Australia.

He has been focusing on the economy, doling out bonuses and cash to government servants, Felda settlers and the poor while talking up the investment inflows into the country through the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) under the New Economic Model (NEM) in what is seen as an attempt to convince fence-sitters to vote for BN.

But the recent harsh security crackdown on electoral reform movement Bersih 2.0 July 9 rally has dented his image, prompting him to do a U-turn five weeks later by announcing a bipartisan parliamentary select committee to review the election system although there is no guarantee that elections will not be held before the reforms are implemented.

The preparations for the country's 13th general election have been building since the Election Commission (EC) began ordering ballot boxes and inquired about using schools as polling stations this November.

The EC has said it normally starts preparing once the Parliament term goes past three out of the maximum five years. The current BN mandate ends in 2013.

BN leaders have been touring several states since early 2011 after Najib told his Umno party that he will visit every state with deputy Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin to assess the mood before seeking his first mandate after becoming prime minister in April 2009.

There is some pressure from his party and coalition members to ensure BN gets a two-thirds parliamentary majority and a few states that it lost in Election 2008 when Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was still the prime minister. BN now has 138 federal seats against 76 held by Pakatan Rakyat (PR), two by SAPP and six independents.

However, The Malaysian Insider understands that the BN leadership is worried about up to 40 federal seats held by the coalition as the party machinery has not been working to sign

up voters or carry out campaigns.

"They have yet to get their act together. And the leaders are worried because it will take more than six months especially to introduce new faces," a BN source told The Malaysian Insider, referring to Najib's promise to put only "winning candidates" in the next general election.

"And if you think the Umno machinery is bad, the worry is also about the other component parties. Some are non-existent," he added.

Umno recently ran simulated polls in several states which showed the ruling federal coalition could lose some states such as Perak, Perlis and Negri Sembilan as party warlords are still bickering about the candidates' list, which is the prerogative of the party president.

Umno and the other BN parties are working on re-capturing Kedah, Kelantan, Penang and Selangor from PR in the next elections. BN won back Perak after several PR lawmakers walked out to be independents that supported the ruling federal coalition.

But the four PR states have said they might not want to call elections at the same time as national polls although the EC has pointed out that simultaneous polls would save costs.

PAS has also asked its much-vaunted election machinery to get prepared for elections as early as November while it seeks to get more seats from the opposition pact, where PKR ran in more seats in Election 2008.

"The seat allocation is going on now and it's getting a bit rough. But we'll get there," a PR source told The Malaysian Insider, saying the coalition will vet its candidates to prevent a high number of defections especially from PKR.

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