

BN leaders make light of Najib's rating slide
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By Yow Hong Chieh

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 29 — Barisan Nasional (BN) lawmakers have downplayed a poll released today that showed a drop in the prime minister's approval rating, and showed little concern that Datuk Seri Najib Razak seemed to be steadily losing popular support.

A Merdeka Center survey released today found that 59 per cent of Malaysians approved of Najib's leadership, down six points in the last three months and 13 points lower than his high of 72 per cent in May last year.

Respondents said they were most troubled by the surge in inflation — which hit a two-year high of 3.5 per cent in June — and the government's heavily-criticised handling of the July 9 Bersih rally.

Umno vice president Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal said he did not believe grassroots support for the ruling coalition and its chairman had taken a hit, citing the strong support shown by Malaysians he had met while pounding the pavement.

He said that while there was no denying inflation was a key issue that must be addressed, the prime minister had shown he was committed to affordable living through his Kedai Rakyat 1 Malaysia programme and other initiatives aimed at relieving the financial burden of the underprivileged.

"There's no doubt things are costly in some areas, some areas are cheap. PM's doing his best to overcome the problem," he told The Malaysian Insider.

He added that those who had taken a negative view of Najib's stewardship of the country were more worried about issues of race and religion than the rising cost of living.

MCA vice president Donald Lim similarly said those polled were likely responding to recent events like the government's harsh clampdown of the Bersih rally as well as rising inter-religious tension, and blamed the opposition for politicising such issues.

"The opposition, especially DAP, has twisted and turned the issue. Even the Jais (Selangor Islamic Religious Department) issue, it is also blamed on BN," he said.

The deputy finance minister added that inflation was a global phenomenon now aggravated by rising oil prices and debt woes in Europe and the US, but pointed out that Malaysia's 3.4 per cent inflation was still low compared to over five per cent in Singapore.

Former MIC secretary-general Datuk T. Rajagopalu said no one could question Najib's hard work as the prime minister was constantly working on realising his transformation plans for the good of the people.

"The prime minister is daily doing his job... He's doing his movement," he said.

Rajagopalu said rising living costs were due solely to profiteering middlemen who "increase the price like hell" and urged the Domestic Trade, Co-operatives and Consumerism Ministry to supervise this group more closely.

His colleague, MIC vice president Datuk M. Saravanan, dismissed outright the poll results as untrue, claiming that the people were still confident of Najib's ability and leadership.

He suggested the survey methodology was flawed as Merdeka Center could have accidentally only interviewed the "20 per cent" of the population who were critical of the prime minister and his policies.

"I don't believe the survey. Probably they woke up on the wrong side of the bed," he said.

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