

**Polls dry run shows BN can lose Perak, Negri Sembilan**  
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**By Jahabar Sadiq**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 1 — The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) could lose Perak and Negri Sembilan in the next general elections, according to results of a recent dry run. Unless component parties put popular faces and ensure the grassroots machinery garner 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 their political opponents Pakatan Rakyat (PR), something unheard before Election 2008 when the ruling coalition lost six seats.



Prime Minister Najib faces challenges of Bersih, economy and rising inflation.

It is also learnt that Perlis, where BN holds 14 out 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.

“The dry run has shown a lot of weaknesses. And the Wahhabi issue is not helping,” an Umno source told *The Malaysian Insider*.

An upcoming Umno leader expressed similar sentiments, saying BN must put new faces to renew the coalition while getting respective party machineries to go all out for support.

“The problem is while the Umno machinery can work if given the motivation, members of the other component parties do not appear to be that motivated,” said the Umno leader, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

He 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 Pakatan Rakyat (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 elections.

"Perak Umno is strong and can win 33 state seats but divisional leaders won't move unless they or their favourites get picked," an Umno source said then.

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

"The situation hasn't changed in Perak and now it is the same in Negri Sembilan as the opposition is getting stronger, knowing that Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan might not remain as menteri besar," the Umno source said.

Mohamad is tipped to contest a federal seat, leaving his post vacant and an attractive target for the other state Umno divisional leaders.

"There is some heavy lobbying going on in Negri Sembilan for the MB's post but they all forget that the victories were narrow in Election 2008," he added. BN won 21 out of the 36 seats in the state assembly, 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 elections.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has not hinted at general elections yet although his deputy Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin told BN to prepare for polls in the near future. Most 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 Najib 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.

The prime minister, who is also finance minister, also has to handle the country's economy, which has slowed down to 4.6 per cent in the first quarter amid stagnating wages and rising inflation. He has announced a new focus on keeping prices low while Muhyiddin announced that the government was considering food stamps for the very poor.

Opposition politicians are making the rising inflation an election issue, pointing out the government remained profligate with plans to buy new patrol vessels and fighter jets despite asking people to tighten their belts.

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