

**Pakatan claims polls delay may cost BN votes**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 4 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak runs the risk of leading Barisan Nasional (BN) into electoral disaster if he holds off calling for a general election, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders have warned.

The leaders pointed out that although the prime minister may not currently be on his best election footing, any delay may see his administration further plagued with more corruption exposés involving his ministers.

Scandals surrounding senior ministers Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil and Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom and deputy minister Datuk Awang Adek Hussin, they agreed, could likely derail Najib's plans to recapture BN's coveted two-third parliamentary majority, an outcome the first-term prime minister could ill-afford.

They added that this would also threaten the feel-good factor arising from Najib's Budget 2012 handouts last year, which they say is fast dissipating.

"It (the general election) has to be held within the timeline of the Budget goodies' handouts," PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar told The Malaysian Insider in a SMS response yesterday.

"The goodwill arising from the on-going cash handouts to the populace — RM100 to school children, RM500 to low-income households, etc — will dissipate within a few months," DAP publicity secretary Tony Pua agreed.

He added the Najib government could ill-afford another round of such extensive cash handouts as it continues to grapple with record debt-levels and Budget deficits.

"To delay is to really wipe off all that feel-good factor... people are already sure that the RM100 handout belongs to them... It was not given by Najib or BN or ... from Umno coffers; it was the rakyat's money," PAS central committee member Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said.

The Malaysian Insider reported on Sunday that Najib was likely to reshuffle his Cabinet as early as this month and delay calling for a general election until later this year, to recoup any lost support arising from the corruption scandals.

It is believed senior officials at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) have a list of potential new ministers and deputy ministers that will be seen as "Najib's people" to execute his New Economic Model (NEM) and political transformation programme as he heads into the general election.

"Najib needs more of his own men in the Cabinet. And he needs to replace those seen as tainted before he calls an election," said an Umno lawmaker close to the party president.

"There is no question that Najib is plagued by a series of corruption scandals as he enters the run up to the next general election. These scandals will no doubt lead to a loss of votes

to BN and confidence in his 'transformation' agenda," Pua agreed today.

The Petaling Jaya Utara MP added that delaying the polls may see more exposés in the media, further hampering Najib's dream of an easy victory at the polls.

Pua noted that economic uncertainty in 2012 could also add to the bleak projection for BN's chances in the polls.

"BN will not do well in a further weakened economic environment in Malaysia. As it stands, Singapore's latest economic data already showed a contraction of 4.9 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2011 and the performance in Malaysia is unlikely to be much more encouraging," he said.

Agreeing, Nurul Izzah added that such uncertainties abroad could spell "doom" for Najib's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP).

"Najib has little choice either way; snap polls are [also] no guarantee of a BN win," she said.

"If he calls for polls earlier... he will not be any worse off. He is caught now between a rock and a hard place," said Dzulkefly.

However, the PAS MP predicted that Najib, whom he described as a "risk-averse person", was unlikely to dive head-on into an election without attempting to gloss over his administration's image by delaying its timing.

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