

UM study: Najib seen to trump Anwar in economy
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 19 — Twenty-seven per cent of Malaysians see Datuk Seri Najib Razak as the more capable leader in managing the country's economy compared to his political arch-foe Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, according to the latest survey from the University of Malaya (UM).

The prime minister appeared to have impressed the younger set of Malaysians below the age of 40, compared to 21 per cent who believe the PKR de facto chief is the more capable leader.

The biggest show of support for Najib — 19 per cent — were from undergraduates aged between 21 and 22; while for Anwar, it was the older set of Malaysians aged 41 onwards.

The premier varsity's Centre of Democracy and Elections (UMCEDEL) had polled 2,559 respondents of diverse socio-economic backgrounds and ages between October 25 and December 15 last year for a study on perceptions on Malaysian politics and leadership ahead of the 13th general elections

The mandate for the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, led by 58-year-old Najib, expires in March next year.

Following Anwar's acquittal of a sodomy charge earlier this month, political and economic observers say Najib may call for elections as early as March to capitalise on his feel-good Budget 2012 and push forward political and economic reforms to strengthen Malaysia's competitiveness amid a wobbly world economy.

Najib has promised cash handouts, more money for civil servants, schools and a fund for "high-impact development" projects as part of his Budget 2012 measures to put cash in the pockets of voters ahead of a general election expected soon.

In the UM survey, 44 per cent said the Budget has helped lower rising living costs, while 32 per cent disagree and a notable 24 per cent said they were not sure.

The PM's popularity continued to dominate with 32 per cent of those polled who see him having good public relations compared to 26 per cent who see Anwar as a leader with good relations.

Of those polled, 44 per cent said they are satisfied with BN's performance in Putrajaya, although a significant 37 per cent said they disagreed.

As such, 43 per cent seem to believe the incumbent coalition will continue to win the next national polls.

A significant 39 per cent appear to be uncertain although 18 per cent think Anwar's opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) bloc may cause an upset and form the next federal

government.

According to UM's research, the biggest support for the BN was from Malays with as high as 46 per cent, followed by the Indian community at 40 per cent and trailed far behind by the ethnic Chinese at 28 per cent.

Support for the PR faction appeared to be quite even with Malays at 18 per cent, same as with the ethnic Chinese and 16 per cent from ethnic Indians.

The BN's 1 Malaysia concept, which was mooted by Najib when he took over office from Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in April 2009, has drawn 43 per cent support; and a stunning 56 per cent of ethnic Indians credited it for increasing their support of the ruling coalition.

Yet 37 per cent of the respondents believe that elections in Malaysia are not conducted fairly. Half of the 383 ethnic Chinese polled said so.

But 32 per cent disagreed and said polls were transparent; another 31 per cent said they were not sure.

Widespread publicity of the sex video clip that has been linked to 64-year-old Anwar has disenchanted 20 per cent of those UM researchers polled who believe allegations that the former Umno leader really did fornicate with an alleged prostitute.

Forty-five per cent seemed uncertain.

Another 38 percent of the 2,559 people surveyed said the sex video has damaged Anwar's credibility while 31 per cent said it has not.

But the allegations against the Opposition leader has lead 40 per cent saying they doubt PKR is able to stay strong without Anwar as its boss.

UMCEDEL, which said it specialises in research and publication on democracy and elections in Malaysia, polled 1,980 Malays who formed the bulk of its latest survey.

Ethnic Chinese and Indian participants numbered 383 and 151 people, respectively. Age-wise, the research house engaged the most with those age between 22 and 30 years old, who totalled 862 people.

UMCEDEL put the margin of error for this survey at 1.9 per cent.

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