

Najib hints at nearing polls
The Malaysian Insider
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, March 24 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak indicated today that he will soon call general elections, adding that confidence in his Barisan Nasional (BN) has surged of late.

Umno-controlled Berita Harian reported the prime minister as saying in Port Dickson that "rasa-rasa bunyi (PRU) dah dekat (feel the sounds (of elections) are near)."

The Umno president said two days ago he will dissolve Parliament when public confidence towards his administration is at its highest level.

"The right time (is when) there is a high level of confidence in the government... we are still gauging situations (to) see what kind of support (we have)," he told Chinese-language radio station 988FM in an interview.

Asked whether polls would be called by May or June, Najib said it depended on his administration's ability to "overcome outstanding issues."

The Malaysian Insider had reported two weeks ago Najib is looking to lead his coalition into federal polls for the first time in the first half of the year if he can put to bed controversies surrounding the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) and Malaysia Airlines (MAS).

This could mean that Najib might not renew Wanita Umno chief Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil's senatorship after April 8 and end her ministerial career as her family runs the NFC which has seen almost daily exposes of a luxury property spending spree.

The Malaysian Insider also reported early this month the prime minister was reviewing the MAS-AirAsia share swap done last August that has yet to show any promised results.

In a boost to his confidence, a recent poll showed that Najib's approval rating has surged by 10 percentage points to 69 per cent on the back of an improving economy and the cash handout of RM500 to low-income earners under the Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M).

Pollsters Merdeka Center found that the prime minister's support was highest among households earning less than RM1,500 a month at 78 per cent, with four-fifths of Indians and 74 per cent of Malays also giving Najib the thumbs up.

But less than half of the 1,022 voters polled in Peninsular Malaysia last month said "they were happy with the government."

His popularity had been on a steady decline since hitting a peak of 72 per cent in May 2010, dropping to 69 per cent in November the same year before sliding to 59 per cent in August 2011.

Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi led BN to its worst electoral result in the 2008 general election, when it lost five states to Pakatan Rakyat as well as its customary two-thirds supermajority

in Parliament.

Observers say Najib took over in April 2009 ostensibly to improve on the ruling coalition's performance with only a return to two-thirds majority able to guarantee he remains in power.

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