

Budget date puts paid to speculation of 'early' general election
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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has put a dampener on speculation that the 13th general election is imminent – by announcing that the 2013 Budget will be tabled on Sept 28.

Many had been expecting the Prime Minister to announce the dissolution of Parliament in the next few weeks with polling in late June or early July.

However, the Budget date has put paid to such talk.

Instead, it has led to comparisons with the decision made by former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1999.

“Dr Mahathir tabled the Budget on Oct 15 that year and while MPs were still debating the Budget, he went to see the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and had Parliament dissolved on Nov 11,” said a senior Barisan Nasional politician.

“The general election was held on Nov 29 that year.

“Najib could do the same thing by tabling an election budget and using it as his manifesto to go into the 13th general election, just as Dr Mahathir did for the 10th GE.”

Najib announced the date of Budget 2013 at the start of the annual budget consultations yesterday, during which the Finance Ministry received 84 memoranda.

He said the 2013 Budget would focus on quality and balanced growth.

Election Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof said Najib had the prerogative to ask for Parliament to be dissolved “at any time he wanted”.

He said the polls could still be called in June or July, adding that the commission was prepared for both months.

The EC will gazette the latest electoral roll at the end of this month when the objection period is over.

“Based on past practice, Parliament has never completed its full five-year term.

“Although faced with the task of implementing electoral reforms for the coming polls, we are prepared in terms of manpower, training and logistics if it is called in July,” he said.

He said the present Dewan Rakyat expires only on April 24 next year and that polls must be held within 60 days.

Prior to the announcement of the Budget date, there was also talk that Najib might call for the polls before the start of Ramadan on July 20.

It had been speculated that the “brief but possible window of opportunity” would be feasible if Najib decided to seek advice from the King to dissolve Parliament shortly after it convenes on June 11.

When Dr Mahathir called for polls in 1999, the GE was held just before the start of Ramadan in December that year.

Pundits say that besides positive indicators for the economic, political and social transformation programmes, Najib may also look at religious aspects, which could play a role in the country's predominantly Muslim society.

The next Parliament meeting ends on June 28 and if Najib decides to dissolve Parliament midway, campaigning will have to be carried out in the Muslim month of Rejab, one of the holiest during which abstaining from fighting and wrongdoing is paramount.

Campaigning during this period could lessen the tense political rivalry building up over the past months.

The conclusion of the polls would then be followed by Ramadan, a month-long "cooling-off" period for reconciliation and the fostering of good relations.

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