

BN on track for snap poll, looking at July date
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 6 — A general election could be called as early as July, before the Ramadan fasting month begins, as the Bersih 3.0 rally has not affected support for the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, sources say.

The Malaysian Insider understands that a June election has been ruled out as Datuk Seri Najib Razak will be away on holiday for nearly two weeks from the middle of May, although he will attend a "Friends of BN" gathering in London on May 14.

"After Umno anniversary celebrations on May 11, the prime minister will go for an event in London, then he will attend his son's graduation before going off to Spain for a vacation," a source told The Malaysian Insider.

"So, it isn't likely in June. July looks good as most BN warlords are ready for a general election," he added, saying it could be held before July 19 when the fasting month is expected to begin. More than 60 per cent of Malaysians are Muslims who generally refrain from political activity during the fasting month.

Another source said the BN chairman has been inspecting and encouraging his colleagues and supporters across the country, with a recent visit to Gua Musang on Friday where he brushed off speculation that the polls may be delayed following the Bersih 3.0 fracas, saying the date would be decided based on how the people view the government.

Several foreign media reports have predicted that the Najib administration may have to postpone the 13th general election due to a possible negative backlash over the government's handling of last Saturday's protest.

But the prime minister, responding to the speculation at a press conference here, smiled when posed the question and said on Friday, "The date of the election is not contingent upon all this."

"Well, it's up to the public to decide. We will decide on the basis of how the people view the government, you see," Najib said.

The source also pointed out that Najib and deputy prime minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, have visited all states in the past few months, with the BN chief in Sarawak last week while his deputy was in Sabah last weekend.

"They are confident and the BN chiefs in the states are confident too. So an early general election is on the cards," he added.

He noted that the Bersih 3.0 sit-in rally, held in 11 cities across the country and some 80 locations around the world, had only reinforced voters' preference for an election.

"BN is still strong. Bersih had little effect as it was hijacked by PKR and the violence has put off fence-sitters," the source added.

Najib's approval rating, at a lofty 69 per cent in the most recent opinion poll, had led to speculation of a June election although the BN mandate only expires in March next year. The coalition controls 138 out of the 222 seats in the Dewan Rakyat and all states except four, ruled by the rival Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

The next election will see some 2.2 million new voters, who registered between the last general election in 2008 and the end of last year. Nearly 60 per cent of the new voters are Malays, the dominant community in the country.

Election Commission (EC) statistics showed that Selangor had registered the highest number of voters during 2011 itself with 165,222 individuals, followed by Johor (124,240), Perak (96,710), Sabah (86,927), Kedah (84,704), Kelantan (69,344), Penang (64,029), Sarawak (63,305), Kuala Lumpur (61,040), Pahang (59,639), Terengganu (45,190), Negeri Sembilan (42,009), Malacca (31,827), Perlis (9,881), Labuan (2,863) and Putrajaya (1,920).

Bersih, a coalition of 84 groups, have disputed the EC electoral rolls and have called for a clean and fair election during their three rallies from 2007, the last being on April 28 where tens of thousands turned up for a peaceful sit-in. It was marred by violence when several protestors breached barricades from Dataran Merdeka which the authorities closed down to prevent the sit-in.

The Najib administration responded after Bersih 2.0 last July with the formation of a parliamentary select committee (PSC) that made 22 recommendations but Bersih still insist the electoral rolls are not cleaned up.

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