

**Not impossible to have polls during Haj, says Najib**  
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**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KUALA LUMPUR, June 22 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak has not discounted the possibility of having a general election during the Haj pilgrimage season, saying today it has been done before.

“In (the country’s) history, elections have been conducted during Haj... in 1986 elections happened during Haj, during the tenure of [Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad],” Najib told reporters today.

The PM was asked to respond to PAS deputy president Mohamad Sabu’s remarks demanding he not call for election until after the Haj season. The Haj begins October 26.

“Only God decides on sins and blessings. We are not stopping anyone... if you want to go for Haj, go,” added Najib, who went for the pilgrimage last year.

Sources have said, however, that the Haj pilgrimage on October 26 and Barisan Nasional’s (BN) efforts to court the youth and Chinese vote could delay the general election to November.

The Malaysian Insider had reported on May 28 of a possible September general election but Najib’s announcement that Budget 2013 will be tabled on September 28 has pushed party strategists to look at a later date to ensure Budget goodies get to the ground also.

Election Commission (EC) sources say the commission is ready for polls but has yet to get any indication of snap polls for the 222 federal seats and 505 state seats, except the Sarawak state assembly which was elected last year.

Officials familiar with BN strategies say Najib wants the ruling coalition to win back urban seats lost when the mainly urban Chinese voted in favour of the opposition in Election 2008.

The prime minister’s approval rating among the Chinese and Indian communities has slipped following the April 28 Bersih 3.0 rally, said pollster Merdeka Center but its latest survey showed Najib’s rating at 65 per cent, a drop of four percentage points from an earlier survey. Former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s approval rating was 71 per cent when he called snap polls in March 2008.

BN coalition sources say several recent surveys show BN needs to work harder to achieve a convincing victory, especially with some 2.2 million voters casting ballots for the first time. The next general election is only due after April 2013 when BN’s mandate expires.

It is understood a compilation of surveys revealed that BN could win up to 146 parliamentary seats with at least 80 convincing wins, more than the 140 won in Election 2008.

The source said additional surveys will be conducted in this month and BN strategists will compile and assess the results during the Ramadan and Syawal months.

Sources had told The Malaysian Insider that a July election was a possibility as election materials have been imported and are in warehouses waiting to be distributed. Several

Umno divisions have also begun putting up flags in the capital city and across the country, prompting speculation of snap polls. The coalition controls 138 out of the 222 seats in the Dewan Rakyat and all states except for four, which are ruled by rival Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

The Najib administration has focused on various demographics but a proposal to abolish a federal education fund by PR could cause support to sway among the youth, a key component of the electorate and comprising at least 20 per cent of the 12 million-strong electoral list. Nearly 60 per cent of new voters are Malays, the dominant community in the country.

The Bersih 3.0 rally asking for the electoral list to be cleaned up has also cut some support for the government as nearly 200,000 people had a sit-in in Kuala Lumpur together with thousands of others in cities and towns across both Malaysia and the world.

Najib had on May 4 brushed off speculation that polls may be delayed following the Bersih 3.0 fracas, saying the date would be decided based on how the people view the government. "The date of the election is not contingent upon all this," he said then.

"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 added.

Bersih, a coalition of 84 groups, has disputed the EC electoral roll and has called for a clean and fair election during its three rallies beginning 2007, the last taking place on April 28 where tens of thousands turned up for a peaceful sit-in. It was marred by violence when several protestors breached barricades around Dataran Merdeka which the authorities had closed to the public following a court order.

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

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