

**PM slams PAS for calling members to defer Haj for polls**  
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**By Lisa J. Ariffin**

KUALA LUMPUR, June 25 — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak today hit out at PAS for calling on its members who are directly involved in the general election to defer performing the Haj amid speculation that polls may be held during the pilgrimage season.

"We are very shocked; how could an opposition party place their party agenda over Islam itself?" Najib said in his address today during the launch of his latest book "The Islamic Agenda in Transforming the Nation".

"They are willing to ask party members to defer performing the Haj solely to face the upcoming general election, even though the fifth 'rukun (pillar)' of Islam states if you can afford to perform the Haj then go and do not delay it," he added.

Najib gave his assurance the government "will weigh in all factors before calling for polls" and "[he] will make sure the consideration is in line with Islam itself".

On June 5, PAS information chief Datuk Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man reportedly said in a posting on selangorku.com that it was necessary for those involved in the general election to defer their pilgrimage because PAS needed its election machinery to carry out its tasks.

He reportedly said the party had monitored developments in the country and gathered that the general election would be held during the Haj season, which runs between Aidilfitri and Aidiladha.

Ibrahim has since come under fire for his remarks, with Umno information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan accusing PAS of going overboard and urging the party to apologise for putting elections above Islam.

Federal Territories and Urban Wellbeing Minister Datuk Raja Nong Chik Raja Zainal Abidin said the request should not have been made as Haj is more important to Muslims than politics.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal echoed his colleagues' sentiments, saying PAS should not stop Muslims from performing Haj and use it for politics.

Sources have said 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 Chinese voted in favour of the opposition in Election 2008.

BN sources say several recent surveys show the coalition needed 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.

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