

**November polls likely after the Haj as BN courts youth, Chinese vote**  
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**By Jahabar Sadiq**

KUALA LUMPUR, June 7 — 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, sources say, adding Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is still scrutinising the candidates' lists to ensure a bigger victory.

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 further date to also ensure budget goodies get to the ground.

"The Haj could delay the vote just as much as BN wants the people to enjoy the benefits of Budget 2013. We're looking at November now," a source told The Malaysian Insider.

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.

"The window is narrowing for polls in July as the Ramadan fasting month starts late that month, followed by celebrations for Hari Raya Aidil Fitri after that. It looks like it will go beyond Budget Day and the Haj," one EC source said.

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.

"Najib wants support from the Chinese and the youth, so the next few months will be crucial for those efforts," a coalition source told The Malaysian Insider.

He pointed out that the BN chairman is due to attend the TwtupKami gathering in Bukit Jalil this Saturday, where thousands of youths on the Twitter social media network are expected to turn up for a day of fun and games. The organisers have already invited Najib to play the ukelele at the event, which is said to have been organised with the help of the ruling coalition.

"The TwtupKami is similar to the Suara Kami concert last year where the PM also turned up. He is working hard to get the youth vote," the source added.

Najib's recent promotion of Gerakan secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow as the Penang BN chief is also seen as part of efforts to push up more Chinese leaders to attract support from the economically-powerfully community that forms some 23 per cent of the population.

The prime minister's approval rating from the Chinese and Indian communities has slipped after the April 28 Bersih 3.0 rally, said pollster Merdeka Center but its latest survey showed Najib's rating is 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 get 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 the compilation of surveys revealed that BN could win up to 146 parliamentary seats with at least 80 sure wins, more than the 140 won in Election 2008.

The source said the surveys will be done in June and BN strategists would 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 had been imported and were 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 four, 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 in the electorate and comprising at least 20 per cent of the 12 million-strong electoral list. Nearly 60 per cent of the 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 others in cities and towns across Malaysia and the world.

Najib had on May 4 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. "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 rolls and has called for a clean and fair election during its 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 around 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 insists the electoral rolls are not cleaned up.

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