

Najib announces civil servant bonus as polls loom
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KUALA LUMPUR, July 25 — Civil servants will be given a half-month bonus while government pensioners will receive a special RM500 payout next month, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today, amid expectations that elections will be held as soon as September.

The bonus for civil servants and special payment for government pensioners will cost taxpayers an estimated RM2.2 billion.

The prime minister said in a statement today that civil servants would be guaranteed a bonus of at least RM500.

There are 1.27 million civil servants and 657,000 government pensioners. They are considered an important group of voters and their support is seen as crucial to an election victory for Najib's Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

Najib said the bonus payments would be made by August 9, about 10 days before Hari Raya Aidilfitri.

The prime minister said the bonus payments were being made based on the federal government's strong financial position.

He added that it was a token of appreciation by the government to civil servants and government pensioners.

The Malaysian Insider reported last week that the Najib administration is looking at a snap election in September before Malaysia Day if it goes through with a plan to dissolve parliament next month.

It is understood that Najib's aides and BN officials have briefed a number of people on the plan to hold elections between Hari Raya Aidilfitri, which falls on August 19, and the proposed Budget Day of September 28. Malaysia Day is on September 16.

Najib has been cagey about the election date although he expressed confidence in winning all state governments and the federal government. His BN controls Putrajaya and nine states while the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) rules Kedah, Kelantan, Penang and Selangor. PR lost Perak in February 2009 when three lawmakers turned independent, which was enough for BN to capture the state.

Last week, Cuepacs and a newly-launched government pensioners club pledged their "undivided" support to Najib and the BN administration for the coming elections.

Critics from the federal opposition have often condemned government leaders for allegedly abusing the country's civil service, long viewed as a key vote bank for the ruling BN pact.

Top government officials have also gone on an apparent overdrive to protect the BN government they serve.

Newly-appointed Chief Secretary to the Government Datuk Seri Ali Hamsa had recently raised eyebrows when he told his new charges that they "should know better" than to believe the "empty promises" made by the opposition.

Najib, who is seeking his first mandate at the polls, has been touring the country with his Jelajah Janji Ditepati (Promises Fulfilled Tour) over the past few months and is due to visit Kelantan and Terengganu soon for the campaign. Ironically or coincidentally, Janji Ditepati (Promises Fulfilled) is also the theme for this year's National Day on August 31.

Nearly 13 million voters are eligible to cast their ballot if a general election is called involving all 222 federal seats and 505 seats in 12 states. However, the four PR-ruled states have yet to say if they will hold elections on the same day as the general election because their mandates only expire next April. Sarawak held its state election last year.

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