

Najib's popularity won't keep BN afloat, says Pakatan Malaysian Insider

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KUALA LUMPUR, July 28 —While Datuk Seri Najib Razak's personal popularity is unlikely to buoy the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) at the coming general election, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders have said they are on guard against complacency following the latest survey by independent pollster Merdeka Center.

The prime minister and head of the 13-member BN coalition is in a rocky position due to declining support among Malay voters, who have the most clout as they represent more than 60 per cent of Malaysia's 28 million multiracial population, said PKR's Rafizi Ramli and his DAP ally, Tony Pua.

"If compared to the support Pak Lah had before the 2008 election, with DS Najib's figures (that) are in the 60s, he's in trouble," Pua told The Malaysian Insider yesterday.

The DAP publicity chief was comparing Najib's approval scores in the last three surveys carried out by the Merdeka Center this year to his predecessor, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's. The fifth prime minister popularly known by his moniker Pak Lah enjoyed a 71 per cent approval rating before calling for an election in March 2008 where the ruling coalition received a drubbing.

Speculation has been mounting that Najib will call snap polls this year before the BN mandate expires in April 2013.

"The number supporting the prime minister is not the marker for support in the upcoming general election, the marker determining the general election's result will be the number supporting Barisan Nasional," Pua said.

Rafizi, the PKR strategy chief, echoed the Petaling Jaya Utara MP's view, noting that Najib has been projecting himself as the "pulse and saviour of BN" but was not, at the same time, defending the other component parties within the coalition.

"It's not a team effort; it's actually his persona. He believes it's his personal strength that will pull BN now.

"If I were Najib, I would be very gloomy. I would be very worried," Rafizi said at a news conference yesterday.

But their PAS colleague, Salahuddin Ayub, cautioned the federal opposition pact against being complacent, saying the Merdeka Center survey alone was not strong enough to evaluate Najib's strengths or weaknesses.

"Even though Merdeka Center's survey results are in favour of Pakatan Rakyat, we must not feel comfortable. We should not be too elated with the survey results that we forget to work hard to win the elections," the PAS vice-president said.

He said the BN's declining support among Malay voters could be due to growing distaste for the sex and moral issues being highlighted by the ruling coalition in the mainstream media they controlled.

"BN has been playing up to the extreme these moral issues until Malay voters who were fence-sitters are fed up and sickened by it.

"When they lose the debate, they will play up moral issues by defaming PR leaders until even the public can see that the BN leadership is not able to debate in a mature manner," he told The Malaysian Insider when contacted.

Salahuddin was also guarded in commenting on Najib's rising support among Chinese voters, from 37 per cent in May to 42 per cent in June, saying it was not impossible as the PM had worked hard to regain the minority race's favour, which had swung towards the opposition parties in Election 2008 and hitherto appeared to have remained there.

Pua, however, dismissed the significance of the changing pattern among Chinese voters, saying support from the community tended to fluctuate.

"It will go up and down, it's not a big issue. But for the Malays, it reflects the transient nature of the Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M) programme. When they first received it, they were so happy, and now it's forgotten," he said, referring to Putrajaya's one-off cash handout of RM500 to households earning less than RM3,000 monthly paid out earlier this year.

"As for the Indians, I'm sure that Ambiga was a factor, but I am unsure just how big a factor," he added.

Popular support for prominent lawyer-activist Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan who has led two massive rallies for electoral reform in the past one year, especially among urban middle-class voters and the Indian community, have been a hurdle Najib appears yet to have conquered in the run-up to elections.

She was recently the target of an Umno MP who suggested she be hanged for "treason" over her actions in organising the latest Bersih rally. Rivals have accused the BN lawmaker of singling out Ambiga because she was Indian and Hindu.

Merdeka Center's opinion survey conducted among voters in peninsular Malaysia showed that satisfaction with the sixth PM's performance declined among Malay and Indian voters from 79 per cent to 75 per cent, and from 72 per cent to 69 per cent, respectively.

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