

**Najib: Lajim, Bumburing exit won't alter polls timing**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 3 — The latest departures of two Sabah Barisan Nasional (BN) lawmakers will not affect the date of the coming polls as speculated, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today, adding that the ruling coalition was taking steps to strengthen its east Malaysian fortress.

The prime minister told reporters today that despite rumours that more would follow in the footsteps of Beaufort MP Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin and Tuaran MP Datuk Seri Wilfred Mojilip Bumburing, BN was capable of dealing with the issue.

"It's okay, at this point there are plenty of rumours going around but what is important is that we are confident that BN's position is not under threat.

"We are able to face this challenge and we will be taking appropriate steps to remedy the situation and strengthen Umno's and BN's position," he told a press conference here after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting today.

Najib said the Beaufort Umno division's deputy chief will now take over as acting head, a post that Lajim had resigned from last weekend when announcing his decision to support Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

"We have also decided that Umno's state liaison body will handle the operations of the Beaufort division and offer whatever help is needed there to ensure that Umno and BN's positions would not be threatened," he said.

When questioned if the duo's exit would affect the timing of the general election, Najib shook his head in disagreement.

"No," he said, before adding, "Well I don't know when the elections will be held — this year or next year. You cannot assume its next year, it could be this year. You cannot assume it's this year, it could be next year."

The Malaysian Insider reported on Monday that the drawn-out exit of Lajim and Bumburing over the weekend was likely to delay the general election from a firm September date to end of the year as the ruling coalition works to retain its "fixed deposit" in the Borneo states.

BN sources in Sabah and Kuala Lumpur said the duo's decision to back PR are among reasons that Najib is re-looking dates for a snap poll after Budget Day on September 28, as he seeks his personal mandate for the first time some three years and three months after taking power in April 2009.

"It is not likely in September now although Umno and its partners are ready for the polls," a BN source from Kuala Lumpur told The Malaysian Insider.

"Umno needs to make sure both Sabah and Sarawak remain a fixed deposit and provide the bulk of seats because the Malay vote is split in the peninsula," the source added, referring to Umno's share of only 79 seats in Election 2008.

Sources had earlier told The Malaysian Insider that a snap poll was likely to happen in September if Najib carries through a plan to dissolve parliament in August, nine months before the BN mandate expires in April 2013.

There have been several dates bandied about in the past year although the country's sixth prime minister has expressed confidence of sweeping the majority of all state and federal seats.

Before the latest defections, BN controlled 22 out of the 25 federal seats in Sabah and one in the Federal Territory of Labuan. In Election 2008, BN lost its customary two-third parliamentary majority largely due to significant losses in the peninsula, where it won just 85 seats while the opposition swept 80 seats.

BN's saving grace was in Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan where the pact trounced the opposition and made a near-clean sweep, winning 55 parliamentary seats to the opposition's two.

But after the weekend, BN now controls 136 federal seats while PR has 76 seats, SAPP two and eight independents in the 222-seat Dewan Rakyat.

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