

PR: We are ready for November polls
Malaysian Insider
September 4, 2012
By Lisa J.Ariffin

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 4 — Opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) declared itself ready if the general election is called in November, its secretariat said today.

PAS secretary-general Mustafa Ali said the coalition “has been ready for a long time now” in response to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak’s indication last weekend that he may call for the general election in November — some five months before his Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition’s mandate expires in April next year.

While the prime minister did not openly state his plan, he appeared to have hinted strongly at the date, mentioning the number “11” several times during his speech at the launch of five Umno divisional delegates’ meetings in Sandakan.

“PR is ready, but almost 100 per cent as preparations can never be 100 per cent,” Mustafa (picture) told a press conference after the PR secretariat meeting here.

“We have long been ready,” he said.

He said November was the “earliest the GE can be held” and “next year is the latest”.

“The general consensus is that the magic number can be used but we don’t know if it’s lucky or not, that number 11,” he said.

“We have had elections in November but Umno lost badly then,” he added.

Najib and his Cabinet ministers have been mounting whirlwinds tours of the country in the last few months in the run-up to polls.

Malaysia’s strong economic growth at 5.4 per cent in the second quarter this year and growing electoral support appear to be boosting confidence levels for the ruling BN leadership to call for snap polls soon, several of the coalition’s strategists told The Malaysian Insider last week.

“There is momentum building up and conditions are ripe for an election after the Budget next month,” a strategist told The Malaysian Insider.

Another strategist said BN had pencilled the 60 days after Budget Day on September 28 as the likely period for the general election as goodies from the Budget proposals and positive economic numbers could influence a majority of the 12-million-strong electorate to return the coalition to power.

“BN has most experience with the economy and all of Najib’s initiatives are starting to pay off,” she had said.

The sixth prime minister is reported to have delayed calling for polls in a bid to win back BN's customary two-thirds control of Parliament and four key states ceded to opposition parties in Election 2008.

The drawn-out exit of two senior Sabah BN leaders over the last two months has also likely delayed polls from a firm September date to the end of the year as the ruling coalition works to retain its "fixed deposit" in the Borneo states, sources told The Malaysian Insider.

BN sources in Sabah and Kuala Lumpur say the pledge of Tuaran MP Datuk Seri Wilfred Bumburing and Beaufort MP Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin to support PR was among reasons that Najib was reconsidering dates for a snap poll for his personal mandate, some three years and five months after taking power in April 2009.

Before the latest defection, BN controlled 22 out of the 25 federal seats in Sabah and one in the Federal Territory of Labuan.

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

Najib's government has seen a slide in approval ratings, with only 42 per cent giving a nod to his administration in a June survey carried out by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research in Peninsular Malaysia, a drop of six percentage points from a month earlier.

But the prime minister remains popular, with a 64 per cent approval rating in June, down from 65 per cent in May. His predecessor, Tun Abdullah Badawi, went into Election 2008 with a 71 per cent approval rating but lost the customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and four states.

Najib is seen as the country's most hardworking politician, with numerous visits to various districts including the latest round under the Jelajah Janji Ditepati (Promises Fulfilled Tour) and cash handouts and pledges to help various demographics.

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