

Pak Lah says BN support still uncertain under Najib's rule
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By Hafidz Baharom

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 25 — Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the man who led Barisan Nasional (BN) to its poorest electoral showing yet in the 2008 federal polls, warned today that the ruling pact's popularity under Datuk Seri Najib Razak remains unpredictable despite the latter's sound policies.

Abdullah, known previously as Malaysia's "Mr Clean" prime minister, told reporters at his Hari Raya open house here that he had experienced the same uncertainty during his tenure, which ended shortly after BN lost its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority in Election 2008.

Abdullah speaks to reporters at his Hari Raya open house in Putrajaya on August 25, 2012.
— Picture by Choo Choy May

He described Najib's reforms and transformative policies as "good", saying he hoped voters were satisfied with them, but added a warning that there was no telling whether it would translate to support for BN.

"With Najib and all the policies he has announced, they are very good and we hope that people like it. But on their inside, we don't know.

"I went through all that before," said the man popularly referred to as Pak Lah.

Since succeeding Pak Lah in 2009, Najib has launched a series of initiatives targeting the middle class, such as the Kedai Runcit 1 Malaysia (1 Malaysia Convenience Store) and Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia (1 Malaysia People's Aid), in a bid to tackle rising cost of living, which is expected to be a key issue in the coming polls.

However, recent developments such as the April 28 Bersih rally have cost BN some of the gains from these initiatives. A Merdeka Center survey in June showed support for the government dipping 6 per cent to 42 per cent, while the prime minister's personal approval rating stood at 64 per cent.

The Malaysian Insider reported yesterday that the prime minister will announce another round of BR1M cash handouts in the Budget 2013 that he is due to table on September 28.

This follows a recent Aidilfitri bonus for civil servants and pensioners, which was preceded by a pay structure revamp that saw salary increases for civil servants across the board.

In Election 2008, BN lost five states to the federal opposition —Penang, Selangor, Perak, Kelantan and Kedah — and only won the popular vote by a margin of 290,000. It later regained Perak after a series of lawmaker defections.

The next election, which must be called by April next year, will see 13.3 million voters casting their ballots in what is seen as the closest election for the nation.

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