

Najib has another fight — to stay on as Umno chief
Malaysian Insider
May 7, 2013

KUALA LUMPUR, May 7 — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak might be heading for another fight — convincing warlords in his own Umno party to keep him on as chief — even as the dust settles from his victorious battle against a galvanised opposition, The Straits Times reported today

The Singapore daily said some analysts expect the Umno president to face a challenge from his deputy in the party elections, held every three years, scheduled before the end of this year.

Najib's (picture) performance in Sunday's election will be the main yardstick used by Umno leaders to decide whether to let the 59-year-old continue as president, or to allow Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, 66, to mount a challenge.

The Umno-led Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition won 133 parliamentary seats on Sunday, with the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) getting 89. In the previous general election, BN had won 140 seats.

The newspaper noted that under Najib, BN had won back Kedah and kept Perak. The latter was taken from PR a year after the 2008 election as a result of defections by several assemblymen; Najib has now secured a mandate to keep it.

It reported that analysts have mixed views over whether Sunday's results are good enough.

"I don't think 133 is a bad number under the current state of politics," it quoted Assoc Prof Sivamurugan Pandian from Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang as saying. "He has won his mandate to do things his own way and to utilise his mandate."

Still, the murmurs in Umno about the looming leadership challenge to Najib will not go away, The Straits Times reported, as he fell short of his own target of getting a two-thirds majority in Parliament. And he did not win back Malaysia's wealthiest state Selangor, despite appointing himself as state election director.

The daily reported that conservative elements within Umno have long been unhappy with Najib's assiduous wooing of the minority Chinese voters, including raising funding to Chinese schools and recognising the degrees of overseas Chinese universities.

In his victory speech early yesterday, Najib said that since voting had been racially polarised — with most Chinese voting for the opposition — "one of the programmes we will undertake is national reconciliation".

But this could be yet "another unwelcome signal" to his critics in the nationalist Malay party, the daily reported a Kedah Umno leader as saying.

Both insiders and observers warn that Umno can ill-afford another divisive leadership battle.

"Umno at this stage cannot afford to have another big fight as this could cause BN to collapse," the paper quoted Prof Mohamed Mustafa Ishak from the National Council of

Professors as saying.

The Straits Times said there are also concerns that while Umno has retained the support of rural Malay voters, urban Malays continued to drift away.

The final signal on Umno's direction could come from former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who still wields much influence, observers told the daily.

Dr Mahathir had helped push Najib's predecessor, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, out of office after BN lost its two-thirds majority in 2008. In March, Dr Mahathir said that if Najib failed to perform, a leadership challenge would be normal.

Much, therefore, might hinge on whether Dr Mahathir gives Najib a passing grade, said the Singapore daily.

Hakcipta © 2013 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/najib-has-another-fight-to-stay-on-as-umno-chief/>