

***Najib's Survival Cabinet***  
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***Malaysian PM turns to old foe's allies for help***

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak has appointed what amounts to a survival cabinet, turning to allies of former foe Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to fend off intra-party challenges in the wake of the May 5 election, in which the opposition actually won the popular vote but was thwarted from taking power by gerrymandered constituencies.

Some of the appointments represent a sharp about-turn by Najib from the policies of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the deputy prime minister, Muhyiddin Yassin, whom an outraged Mahathir is said to be attempting to goad into trying to push out Najib immediately as prime minister and head of the United Malays National Organization instead of waiting until the October party Annual General Assembly. Although the opposition has pointed to the appointments of Shahidan Kassim and Umno secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor as indications of Mahathir's clout, the opposite seems to be true.

In addition to facing internal rebellion for the Barisan Nasional's relatively poor showing in the May 5 polls from the conservative, Malay nationalist wing of Umno, Najib has also borne the brunt of almost daily rallies and demonstrations as the shock troops of Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim charge that the election was stolen from his Pakatan Rakyat coalition with a mix of gerrymandering, ghost voters, outright theft of ballots and other electoral misuses. An estimated 30,000 protesters turned out in light rain in Johor Wednesday night, following rallies of up to an estimated by supporters at 90,000 each in four cities earlier.

Two individuals particularly have drawn Mahathir's fire. They are Khairy Jamaluddin, former Prime Minister Badawi's son in law. Mahathir helped to drive the former premier from power following a relative electoral debacle in 2008 that cost the Barisan Nasional, or ruling national coalition, its two-third parliamentary majority for the first time in history. The other is Mohamad Nazri Abdul Aziz, who Mahathir dubbed Badawi's "hatchet man" and who has openly accused Mahathir of racism.

Khairy, 37, was a charter member of the so-called "fourth floor boys," for their location in Badawi's government offices --relatively young, media-savvy ethnic Malay cadres with good business skills whom Mahathir accused of using their links to Badawi to influence government and UMNO decisions. Khairy has remained a bete noir of the Mahathir wing because of his espousal of moderate racial politics, publicly going to churches and temples that were desecrated by Malay nationalists two years ago.

In the wholesale bloodletting that accompanied Badawi's fall from power, Khairy was one of the few who survived all attempts to dislodge him, even edging out Mahathir's son Mukhriz to become head of the Youth Wing of UMNO. He was named Youth and

Sports minister yesterday by Najib.

Mohamad Nazri Abdul Aziz is if anything an even bigger foe of the Mahathir wing than Khairy. Mahathir, a party insider said, pulled out all the stops to try to prevent his appointment. He earned the octogenarian former prime minister's ire for calling him a "bloody racist" because of Mahathir's support for what Nazri said was a government program indoctrinating racist sentiments on the part of civil servants and public university students. Badawi's former law minister, Nazri was dropped in a cabinet reshuffle. In complete opposition to Muhyiddin, he came out in defense of Najib's 1Malaysia policy, saying he was a Malaysian first and a Malay second. Muhyiddin has repeatedly said Malays come first.

"(Mahathir) made a last ditch effort to block Nazri but Najib went ahead anyway," a well-wired source said. "Najib realizes he needs Khairy and (Badawi's) support in case the Mahathir and Muhyiddin forces move against him in party polls in October or November this year."

For the first time in decades, the Malaysian Chinese Association, which was nearly destroyed in the national election, has no seats in the cabinet. Chua Soi Lek, the party's chairman, declined to join the cabinet after the drubbing his party took, falling to just seven seats in parliament. Gerakan, also once a Chinese party mainstay, also has no seats. Two Chinese named to the cabinet have no party affiliation.

Najib also appointed a total of 13 full ministers from the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, up from eight in the previous cabinet, in what looks like an effort to spike any threatened opposition attempt to peel away the notoriously fickle Borneo MPs. Anwar in the past has attempted to poach MPs from the Barisan with promises of larger shares of oil revenues from offshore crude deposits as well as other enhanced development funds to the two states. He promised during the election to raise Sabah's take on federal oil funds from 5 percent to 20 percent.

Other appointments that bear particular notice are from outside the political spectrum, Najib appointed Paul Low Seng Kuan, 67, Malaysian president of Transparency International, P. Waytha Moorthy, the chairman of the Hindu rights NGO Hindraf, and Abdul Wahid Omar, chairman and chief executive of Malayan Banking Corp. as Ministers in the Prime Minister's Department. Low's appointment appears to be an attempt to polish up UMNO's sullied image for corruption and rent-seeking, Moorthy's as a reward for Hindraf's electoral support, and Abdul Wahid's to place more emphasis on the party's business credentials.

Earlier reports said Najib, who saw the Barisan's parliamentary seats dwindle by seven to 133 to the Pakatan Rakyat's 89, faces being forced out of the premiership at the October AGM in favor of Muhyiddin. The decision to seek the help of the Badawi wing of UMNO could well spell months of instability inside the UMNO leadership as a weakened Najib clings to power in the face of an affronted Mahathir and his allies, who accused him of going too easy on the Chinese in the election.

Mahathir telegraphed his wing's views in a press conference on May 7 to tell reporters he was shocked by the Barisan's performance and laid the blame on "ungrateful"

Chinese and "greedy" Malay voters.

"Most of the Chinese rejected the Malays' hands of friendship ... And that was what we call the 'tsunami'," Mahathir said, adding that "At the same time, we cannot deny Malays who have become greedy. They all want power without considering the means, if they needed to sell out their race they will sell it out."

Although since the election Mahathir hasn't publicly disclosed his rejection of Najib as party leader and premier, he has signaled his irritation by telling reporters that UMNO would have to decide whether Najib Razak should step down, questioning Najib's strategists and saying their ideas may have contributed to BN's poor performance.

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