

Under pressure, PM to dump all five aides who lost GE13 contest
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 12 — All five political aides to Datuk Seri Najib Razak will be dropped from office for purportedly putting their interests above the prime minister's in what is seen as a move to axe the deadwood weighing down his office ahead of Umno elections this year, Barisan Nasional (BN) sources have told The Malaysian Insider.

Handpicked to run in the May 5 polls, Datuk Latt Shariman Abdullah, Datuk Shahlan Ismail, Datuk Mohd Shafei Abdullah, Datuk Mohamad Fatmi Che Salleh and Datuk Mohamed Suffian Awang have come under attack from Umno bloggers and pro-establishment critics following their embarrassing defeat in the 13th general election.

The five had been seen by Najib's "war room" strategists as having the best chances to give a fillip to the ruling BN in its bid to regain the coalition's two-thirds supermajority in Parliament lost since Election 2008.

But Umno bloggers have blasted Najib for allowing his aides to contest in the polls, arguing variously that the five men had little grassroots support in their constituencies.

BN ultimately won 133 seats in the 222-member Dewan Rakyat and Umno, the coalition lynchpin, took 88 federal seats in Election 2013 — up nine from 2008.

But several party veterans have blamed the party and BN's lacklustre performance on Najib's "war room" strategists, and hinted that the prime minister might be shown the door if he does not remove his strategists for their bad advice.

Najib's two special officers, Shahlan and Latt Shariman, were beaten by PAS candidates in Kedah although BN succeeded in snatching back the rice-farming state from the PR pact.

Shahlan lost by 3,935 votes to PAS vice-president Datuk Mahfuz Omar in the Pokok Sena federal seat while Latt Shariman was defeated by PAS's Mohd Nasir Mustafa by a 1,044-vote majority in the Kubang Rotan state seat.

Mohd Shafei, who is Najib's political secretary in the Finance Ministry, lost to PKR's Datuk Dr Tan Tee Kwong by a 5,511-vote margin in the fight for a seat in the Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory, which was significantly bigger than the 2008 results.

Two other special officers, Mohamad Fatmi Mohamed Suffian, were also trounced in the contest for Kota Baru and Kuantan respectively.

The culling of the losers is the first sign of Najib's seriousness in ridding himself of his advisors, many of whom have been blamed for misreading the ground ahead of the closely-fought election.

The BN "war room" had been tasked with selecting the candidates and advising various strategies to win the polls.

It counted Rompin MP Datuk Seri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis, Putra World Trade Centre chairman Datuk Seri Dr Alies Anor Abdul, Petronas director Omar Mustapha Ong, Umno

secretary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Mansor, party information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan and former Terengganu menteri besar Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh as among its members.

The war room had stuck to its prediction of BN winning between 145 and 150 federal seats and also getting back Selangor in Election 2013 although some senior BN leaders were privately doubtful of the figures.

And by noon on Polling Day, the war room had issued its "white list" of 118 federal seats it was sure to win, but some like Pasir Mas, Shah Alam and Lembah Pantai were lost, which some Umno divisional leaders said reflected the disconnect between the leadership and the ground.

The country's sixth prime minister is also under pressure from Umno to distance himself from his "war room" planners, namely Alies Anor, Omar and Jamaluddin, a party insider had told The Malaysian Insider.

Several disgruntled east Malaysian MPs met with veteran Umno lawmaker Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah last night to discuss their positions after not getting anything for their wins in the closely-fought Election 2013, pointing to a lengthening line-up to rattle Najib after he won his first personal mandate with fewer seats than his predecessor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Analysts and other political observers have said that Najib's leadership of Umno may be challenged in the party polls due year end, which could also unravel his hold over the 13-party BN coalition and undermine his default position as prime minister.

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