

In parliament and party, Najib experiences déjà vu
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Just a week before the 13th Parliament of Malaysia meets for the first time, Barisan Nasional members of the house are in talks that could decide whether the Prime Minister gets to enjoy his personal mandate till the next general election.

While there is no immediate threat to the Barisan chairman's term in office, pockets of disgruntled coalition lawmakers want a better deal or else they might either switch their support to Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah or seek a change of leader in the Umno polls at the year end.

Analysts say PM Datuk Seri Najib Razak is not in a position to argue with these MPs. He won just 133 of the 222 federal seats, so if just 23 of the Barisan MPs cross to Pakatan Rakyat for a clutch of posts and other privileges, this could see a new government in Malaysia.

But The Malaysian Insider understands that the implicit threat of such a move is being used within Umno circles to make sure Najib will toe the party line and cut back on his economic, government and political reforms.

Pro-Umno bloggers from the Mahathir camp have already asked for key advisers to quit their posts to take responsibility for their strategies that failed to help Barisan win more seats in Election 2013. These strategies included giving more cash and aid to non-Malay schools and organisations, and relaxing business restrictions.

Together with Malay rights and business entities, they believe that Najib must now provide more for Malays and ignore the other races - a view that is alarming to Najib's allies and also friendly foreign governments who have encouraged the Prime Minister to continue his reforms.

But Najib has reiterated he will continue such policies under his transformation programmes so as to bolster the local economy and drive Malaysia to a high-income nation by 2020.

He has also named 20 East Malaysian MPs as ministers and deputy ministers but more want other positions too, apart from Umno lawmakers who were not named to the Cabinet or other senior jobs.

"He has to appease the Borneo MPs and also the Umno MPs or he faces a rebellion on his hands," a senior Barisan politician told The Malaysian Insider.

Najib is not the first Umno president to face such a threat.

His predecessor faced a similar threat after Election 2008 from within his party and also Pakatan, which had boasted it would capture Putrajaya by September 16 that year by poaching Barisan MPs.

The administration of Tun Abdullah Badawi took the threat seriously enough to send 49 MPs away on an agriculture technology study tour of Taiwan, more than a week before that date - Malaysia Day.

Pakatan lynchpin PKR sent several leaders to Taiwan to speak to the Barisan MPs but the threat never materialised.

But that was enough to lead to Abdullah stepping down as Prime Minister and Umno president seven months later, in April 2009, after pressure from those MPs and his own party.

Interestingly, some of the MPs who went on that Taiwanese tour are now said to be part of a group that has been discussing with Tengku Razaleigh about crossing over to Pakatan.

The Kelantan prince, now the only MP from Najib's father Tun Abdul Razak Hussein's era, has had ambitions to be Prime Minister since 1987 when he challenged Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the Umno presidency.

"Those in talks with Ku Li can move as early as next week to make their point," said a Barisan source, calling the former Umno vice-president by his moniker.

But there are doubts that Tengku Razaleigh can succeed in getting enough Barisan MPs to join Pakatan in a rare vote of no confidence against Najib or cross over for a unity government.

"Like Pak Lah, Najib can beat back such a challenge. But like Pak Lah, will that be enough to quell Umno from acting against him?" the Barisan source said, calling Abdullah by his popular name.

"Now, that's the million-ringgit question, again," he added.

But the source said he expected Najib to make some moves to counter the twin threats against his job in the coming week before parliament opens.

"It should be an exciting week," he said.

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