

Reconciliation talks saving Najib from detractors?

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Pakatan Rakyat's offer of reconciliation talks with rival Barisan Nasional to resolve seething racial and economic problems could have helped Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak fight off detractors who want him out.

A top leader in Pakatan speculates that the offer for talks to find a common solution to the rising inflation rate, and crime and ethnic strife has helped Najib beat back a faction in Umno led by Malay supremacists.

At the same time, said PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli, the "Kajang move", though unpopular, may have further strengthened Najib's ability to convince Umno to start reconciliation talks with Pakatan.

Rafizi is an architect of the "Kajang move" to get opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim elected into the Selangor legislature. Anwar will then be poised to take over as Menteri Besar.

Rafizi based his assessment on Najib's position within Umno, where the embattled president is facing moves to force him out, and on how Najib agreed to the idea of reconciliation talks soon after the Kajang move was announced.

"Anwar has been consistent since the beginning (about reconciliation talks). It's not unity government. It's let leave political mileage out of certain political decisions.

"But there was an impasse. Najib was dilly-dallying; he was watching his back all the time. I dare say that the Kajang move provided him with the grounds to go back to Umno and say that things are changing.

"To tell them that if we ignore the call for reconciliation we will be seen as out of touch with the public because Pakatan is taking this issue seriously," Rafizi said in an interview with The Malaysian Insider.

Najib announced that the BN was open to holding bi-partisan dialogues with Pakatan, three days after Anwar made the offer in a special address.

Anwar's offer was for both coalitions to reach a national consensus over heightened ethnic tension which he described as reaching pre-May 13 levels.

A day after Anwar made the offer, PKR put into motion the "Kajang move" which saw state assemblyman Lee Chin Cheh resigning from his seat in order for Anwar to contest in a soon-to-be called by-election.

Stressing that he had no love for Najib or Umno, Rafizi nevertheless said it was in everyone's interest that Najib's position be strengthened so that he can beat back the forces of intolerance and extremism within Umno.

Rafizi said ever since the 13th general election, the doctrine that Umno needs only the support from the Malay-Muslim community to rule the country has taken root and drowned out voices calling for ethnic inclusion and a multi-ethnic government.

This is since the many seats that Umno won were in Malay majority areas in rural parts of the country.

"This doctrine of a one-race government is being promoted by Mahathir (former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed) and the ultras.

"I have no love for Najib but we have to help Umno believe in an inclusive Malaysian government. Najib has to internally fend off threats that campaign against the doctrine (of an inclusive government).

"He is being attacked internally because he is entertaining minorities," said Rafizi. – February 1, 2014.

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