

Despite crashed jet, economy, no challenge to Najib as PM
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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's job is safe at the moment despite Putrajaya's poor handling of the lost flight MH370 and what is seen as mishandling of the economy, say Umno sources.

The reason: none of Umno's top leaders including deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and vice-president Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi are interested in challenging him despite overtures from the Mahathir camp.

The Malaysian Insider understands that former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his supporters have met both leaders to offer their support to challenge Najib for the party presidency and prime minister's job.

"It didn't happen in the party polls and it is not going to happen for a while. There is no challenger to Najib for his job," a top Umno politician told The Malaysian Insider.

"Najib is safe for his second term as PM. No one wants the job in Umno," he said, adding the search for the lost MH370 has shown the mounting pressure faced by the prime minister.

Malaysia has been repeatedly criticised for mishandling the hunt for the Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777-200ER which went missing with 239 people onboard on March 8 while en route to Beijing.

The passenger jet has yet to be found but Malaysia has declared it lost at sea with no hope for survivors this week based on satellite data, sparking off another round of criticism as there has been no debris found yet.

"Malaysia didn't only lose a plane. The search for Flight 370 has also set the country on a potentially lengthy path to repair its reputation.

"Malaysian authorities have faced a barrage of criticism over perceptions that their search efforts were woefully disorganized, that they were releasing conflicting information, and that they were too slow to reveal crucial new data," The Wall Street Journal said yesterday in a front-page report on the plane search.

But Najib has also faced criticisms about his handling of the economy, where inflation rose to 3.5% in February, up 0.1 percentage point from January.

The inflation rate has been steadily rising from October 2013 when it was 2.6% after Putrajaya announced subsidy cuts and price hikes for fuel, electricity and sugar to cut its fiscal deficit and ensure its ratings remain positive.

"Who wants to handle the economy now and get the blame like Najib? Most of the Umno politicians don't want to take the heat and then lose the polls later.

"So you can see why there is no challenge to Najib," said an official from Najib's Umno party.

The last published Merdeka Center survey showed Najib's approval rating took the lowest dip since he assumed office in 2009, declining to 52% in December 2013 from 62% in August 2013.

Two months after replacing Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as prime minister, Najib had a 65% approval rating.

The respected pollster said the survey was conducted between December 4 and 12, 2013, after the reduction of fuel subsidies in September 2013, and the tabling of the 2014 national budget during which the government announced the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2015.

The survey also showed that Najib's drop in popularity cuts across all races, with the most significant decline being among the Indians, with a drop from 76% to 57%.

Among the Chinese, the approval rate stands at 21%, after a 15 percentage point loss, while a seven percentage point drop, from 73% to 66%, was recorded among the Malays. – March 27, 2014.

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