

Difficult for Umno to remove Najib despite claims of financial scandal, says report
The Malaysian Insider
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Umno will find it extremely difficult to remove Datuk Seri Najib Razak as party president in the wake of allegations made by the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) that money from a government investment firm was channelled to his private bank accounts, the Singapore Straits Times said.

Neither the supreme council nor divisional leaders of the ruling coalition's lynchpin party would be able to come up with the numbers to call for an emergency vote against Najib, who by virtue of his post as party president, is also Malaysia's prime minister.

This is because Umno would need the support of two-thirds of the council members to call for one in writing, or more than half of the party's 191 divisions to approve such a motion at an extraordinary general meeting (EGM).

"Beyond just rallying the numbers, divisional EGMs are easily challenged in court and in the ensuing legal wrangle, Umno members will start being sacked and suspended, among other things," the Straits Times said.

It added that even before the WSJ exposé on funds from 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) being funnelled to Najib's personal bank accounts, opposition party PAS had in April proposed a no-confidence motion against Najib over debt-ridden state fund and its alleged financial management.

But a vote of no-confidence in Parliament would not be easy given that the ruling government under Barisan Nasional (BN) had a clear majority, the Straits Times added.

BN would have to break ranks and work with the opposition for such a vote to be passed, the report said.

It also noted that Malaysia had never seen any motion of no-confidence passed against a prime minister.

Another reason that such a vote was unlikely was because BN leaders would not want to risk losing power, and that "they will simply rally behind another PM candidate", the Straits Times added.

The daily also said that no previous Malaysian leader had been removed through a formal vote, although two party leaders were pressured to make "graceful exits", namely, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was forced out upon pressure from former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and the nation's founding father Tunku Abdul Rahman.

The Straits Times added that Umno MPs felt the allegation of 1MDB funds being transfers into Najib's personal accounts was a "real problem" for the party as it would seem that the money was used to help BN win the last general election.

Last Thursday, WSJ and UK-based website Sarawak Report made the revelation that up to US\$700 million (RM2.6 billion) was allegedly transferred to two bank accounts under Najib's name with AmBank in 2013, ahead of the general elections in May that year.

The prime minister, however, has denied ever taking any funds from 1MDB for personal gain and instead pinned the blame for the latest report on Dr Mahathir whom he also accused of working with foreign agents against his administration.

Deputy prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has urged Najib to provide a "convincing" explanation to the claims.

Najib, meanwhile, has said he intends to sue WSJ.

The financial paper is standing by its story, saying its report was based on solid documentation and proof.

This allegation follows an earlier one, reported by WSJ also, that 1MDB had indirectly funded part of Najib's general election campaign in 2013 through an overpriced purchase of assets from the Genting Group. – July 6, 2015.

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