

Malaysia ready for possible snap election, taking cue from Singapore

Developments across the Causeway could also inspire preparations of a snap vote amid a health crisis

by ALIFAH ZAINUDDIN

MALAYSIA is ready for a pandemic-era snap election amid a standoff that has left Prime Minister (PM) Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin with few options to prove he has the backing of the majority in Parliament.

Political parties on both sides have recently made references to preparations of a general election (GE) despite claims they each held sway over the house. No GE is scheduled until 2023, but deep divisions within existing coalitions have fuelled speculation of an early poll.

Developments across the Causeway could also inspire preparations of a snap vote amid a health crisis. Political commentators have become more certain that a GE would be the only way to break the current impasse and grant the government a fresh five-year mandate.

"The legitimacy of the Perikatan Nasional government has been a point of contention and this can only be resolved with the people's mandate if politicians cannot end it themselves," Universiti Putra Malaysia political analyst Dr Mohd Izani Mohd Zain



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told *The Malaysian Reserve*.

Universiti Sains Malaysia pollster Dr Sivamurugan Pandian said the country is in a better position to conduct a snap election as the rate of new Covid-19 cases have ebbed.

"The Election Commission (EC) is fully prepared. We are better positioned now as reflected in the new Covid-19 cases and as such, the economic impact would also

be subdued," Sivamurugan said.

He expects the election to be called as early as October this year or by March next year.

EC chairman Datuk Azhar Azizan Harun recently told the *Nikkei Asian Review* that the regulator would be ready for a snap poll although it has not received any indication from the government.

He said under the current constitutional

framework, the EC has 60 days to run a GE to its completion after Parliament is dissolved. "It might be challenging, but we are always up to it," Azhar said.

Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan yesterday also called for a snap election, saying that it is unhealthy for Malaysia to remain in political uncertainty.

A simple majority in Parliament requires 112 seats. It is believed that Muhyiddin had the support of at least 113 out of 222 MPs when he was sworn in as PM. The seating plan on May 18 showed there were 114 elected representatives aligned to the government, giving Muhyiddin a slim three-seat majority.

His predecessor Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad also claims to have the majority.

Singapore's *The Straits Times* reported earlier this month that Muhyiddin had made clear his intention of considering a snap poll at a party council meeting on June 4. It also said the PM has been meeting grassroots and has instructed all party leaders to ramp up election preparation.

Mohd Izani expects youth and those severely affected by the pandemic to play an important role should the snap election materialise. Sivamurugan anticipates fence sitters to play a crucial part, adding that protest votes by party loyalists might not occur again as seen in the previous election.