

Najib's three-pronged, day-long attack in Tenang
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As Umno president and BN chairperson, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak yesterday set the tone for the BN machinery in the Jan 30 Tenang by-election, with a three-pronged attack in the state seat.

During his one-day visit, the eloquent orator conveyed different messages to different ethnic groups, trying to raise their expectations, allay their fears and answer some of their grudges.

In the morning, he made a whirlwind visit to all three Felda settlements in Tenang, sending the same message that over the past 30 years, Felda had become the nation's success story, with settlers achieving middle-income status on monthly wages exceeding RM3,000.

"Earning RM3,000 in rural areas compared with Johor Bahru and the Klang Valley, who is better?" asked Najib to a loud answer of "Felda!" from more than 7,000 settlers who attended the rally in Felda Chemplak yesterday.

Brushing off the opposition's allegation that Felda is on the verge of bankruptcy, he stressed that the land development authority would continue to develop and prosper under the leadership of BN government.

As the son of second premier Abdul Razak Hussein, who started the Felda programme, Najib portrayed himself as a successor of his father, publishing a 15-page colour booklet titled '105 Reforms by the Prime Minister', detailing his contributions to the settlers since he took over the Felda portfolio in 2004.

Posters with portraits of Abdul Razak, coupled with banners expressing the settlers' appreciation of the BN, were seen everywhere in the settlements. A short documentary on Abdul Razak's initiative in launching the Felda programme in the 1970s was screened before Najib's arrival.

Najib in his talks highlighted the agenda of development and recalled sentiments of the thanksgiving from the first generation of Felda settlers.

However, it remains to be seen whether the BN will be able to woo the younger generations of Felda settlers, who are the main target of PAS. According to PAS, the younger generations did not benefit from the high price of oil palm and were also facing housing and employment problems.

Don't bother about text messages, Indians told

To the Indian community, which Najib addressed at a rally in the Labis municipal hall, the premier took a line from his counterpart in India to impress the Indian voters.

He claimed that India Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was impressed with Malaysia's achievements during his visit to the country and had insisted on wanting to officiate Little India in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, even though he was advised otherwise by his security

personnel.

Citing Little India, the cabinet committee on Indian affairs chaired by him and his visit to Batu Caves during Thaipusam as examples, Najib tried to convince the local Indian community, made up mostly of low-income families, that they would not be sidelined by the government.

"Don't bother about those text messages that claim the Indians are marginalised... we want the Indian community to improve, together with the other ethnic groups," Najib said to a big round of applause from the 500-strong crowd.

At his last function in Tenang, a tea session in the afternoon with some 700 local leaders of Chinese guilds and associations after officiating the new premises of SJK(C) Labis, the largest Chinese primary school in the constituency, Najib played the card of social stability and racial harmony.

BN, he said, was the only party that could govern a multiracial nation and warned the voters not to gamble away the future of the country and the next generations.

He also tried to pre-empt potential issues the opposition would raise, among them the open verdict from the inquest into the death of DAP political aide Teoh Beng Hock.

However Najib's pledge to unravel the truth far from satisfied the gathering.

A woman in her 70s told Malaysiakini after the event, "If the prime minister really wants to know the truth, why didn't he get to the bottom of it two years ago (immediately after the death)? This government is hao xiao (ridiculous in Hokkien dialect)."

Anwar's credibility questioned

Chinese voters make up 39 percent of the 14,753 voters in Tenang and more than half of them had supported PAS in the last general election. They are the key if Pakatan Rakyat is to reduce BN's majority in this by-election.

Apart from issues that specifically resonated with the different ethnic groups, some of Najib's messages cut across all races, one being his attacks on PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim.

Among other things, the premier at all his functions questioned Anwar's credibility, and cited Anwar failed plan to take over Putrajaya on Sept 16, 2008.

He also touched on the unstable relationship between the secular DAP and Islamic PAS, going on to describe the two parties as "sharing one pillow but having different dreams and ambitions", with their common objective only to "defeat BN".

All Najib's functions saw encouraging responses from the crowds - another testament of Tenang being a traditional stronghold of Umno and BN.

However, the answer as to whether it will continue to remain a BN stronghold will only be known after sunset on Jan 30.

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