

Winnable candidates: Najib's uphill task now
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With delegates unanimously endorsing the Umno presidential address yesterday, Najib Abdul Razak now faces the daunting task of finding "winnable candidates" among its 3.4 million members nationwide to regain the two-thirds majority in Parliament that BN lost in 2008.

Not only that, Najib, along with the other BN component party leaders, will also have to scratch their heads over the selection of winnable constituencies for their winnable candidates to ensure victory.

The task certainly does not look like a walk in the park for Najib, as within the party, he will have to hunt for those acceptable to the local communities and Umno leaders.

In selecting or choosing seats for BN component parties to contest, the Umno president will also have to consider candidates with the best chance of winning.

The target certainly is snatching back the states held by Pakatan Rakyat, cash rich Selangor and Penang, and also Kedah, as well as Kelantan, which has been ruled by PAS for 21 years, under the revered Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

At the same time, Najib will have to plot a counter strategy to defend Perak, which fell into the BN's hands in 2009 following defections from the opposition, and Negri Sembilan, to which it clung by the skin of its teeth.

Door closed on candidature disputes

Umno vice-president Hishammuddin Hussein had said yesterday evening that the party has given the mandate to Najib to decide on the matter.

Hence, the possibility of local party chieftains who may not be "winnable" interfering in the decision-making process does not arise, since all delegates have entrusted Najib with the mission to choose the best persons to represent the party and BN.

Hishammuddin rightly pointed out that there should not be anymore disputes as delegates have left it to Najib to decide on the winnable candidates.

"Those in the hall just now have given him the mandate. They have given the mandate now to the president to decide. The issue now is no longer winnable candidates for Umno, but also BN, or whether the existing formula can be used again."

"It does not mean a place where Umno traditionally contests will remain with Umno, or Gerakan's would remain with Gerakan," he said.

With this broad hint, Hishammuddin revealed the possibility of changes in constituency distribution among component parties to draw forth the best desirable results for the BN.

At the same time, Umno has to ensure that there will be no sabotage attempts this time around, for this is believed to have contributed to the party's and BN coalition's worst showing in 2008.

Taking action against saboteurs

That was the message that rang out time and again from delegates, including a point raised by Federal Territory's Syed Ali Alhabshee who called for the immediate revival of the party disciplinary committee as the general election draws ever closer.

"We have to counter traitors and saboteurs among party members and I would like to propose that the disciplinary committee be activated," Syed Ali said in debating the presidential address at Umno's annual general assembly session at the Putra World Trade Centre's Dewan Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

This, he added, was to ensure that Umno would win this time without the effects of saboteurs hampering the party's chances.

Umno supreme council member Saifuddin Abdullah, in an exclusive interview with Malaysiakini, said that selecting the right candidates for the party was essential now, for gone were the days where the party's name was the sole factor in determining victory.

Saifuddin rightly pointed out that voters now take into account the integrity of the candidate and the party in making their choice.

"Sixty percent rests on the candidates' credentials and 40 percent on the party. Voters and people look at the integrity of the candidate and the party. This is an important aspect that the party must recognise," Saifuddin said.

Unenviable task, says ex PM

Former party president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (left) at a post-assembly press conference, had said that as Umno approached the election with the desire to win, it and the BN partners have to be sensitive to the people's needs and their feelings, apart from so many other things.

"It is a matter for the president of the party to decide who is a winning candidate.

"What he is doing is on the premise of a very important basis and that the person who is going to be fielded as candidate must be a good candidate and be able to execute the responsibility and serve the people."

"The exercise of trying to decide who will be the winning candidate is not an easy job. I am telling you I went through that, it is not an easy job," Abdullah said.

He said Najib would now have to scan for the best for the 222 parliamentary constituencies, as well as for the various state seats.

Besides this, Najib would have to appease not only Umno members but also those from the BN component parties to ensure the coalition regains the two-thirds majority and wins back the states lost in the last general election.

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