

Internal sabotage still a major concern for Najib

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Umno president Najib Abdul Razak has warned the party that one of the biggest challenges it will face in the next general election is the prospect of internal sabotage.

In his winding up speech at the Umno general assembly, Najib explained that some of those who are not fielded as candidates for the next general election may react this way.

"I believe that the enemy is not strong, I am confident people will side with Umno and BN, I am just worried a tiny bit, just a tiny bit - about the issues among ourselves," he said, during his 45-minute speech.

Under Najib's helm, BN has jettisoned its old formula of choosing candidates - which allows division leaders to exert influence on decisions - to a system in which the top leadership will handpick "winnable candidates".

In essence, the new system meant that incumbency, influence and seniority no longer played a major factor in the selection of candidates.

Silent survey

Najib related that party vice president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi had conducted a survey asking party members: "If you are not chosen as candidate, will you fully support the chosen candidate for for Umno and BN?"

"This question is important, I will not ask you to fill any forms now but I want everyone in this hall, when you are on your way back in the cars and buses, ask your conscience," he said.

The same question was on Thursday mysteriously circulated through phone text messages within the vicinity of the Putra World Trade Centre which played host to the general assembly, believed to be targeted at delegates.

Najib noted while most delegates were loyal he was worried that there may be some who would "fan the fire" among party members if they are not chosen as candidates.

"If our resolve is not strong, it will become from 'fully support' to just 'support', from 'support' to 'refusing to work' and worst yet - sabotage or jumping ship," he said.

Najib then asked the delegates thrice if they were prepared to pledge unconditional support regardless of candidacy issues, to which the hall reverberated with "Yes" three times.

"If that is truly (the answer) in our hearts, then god willing, Umno and BN will regain two-thirds majority (in Parliament)," he said.

Name dropping

In an apparent bid to shore up his credentials further, Najib publicly thanked two former prime ministers - Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Both men, in particular Mahathir, still has clout with the party grassroots, judging from the rapturous response their received from the delegates.

Najib said that Mahathir had backed him despite their disagreements on certain issues.

"He told me even he disliked some people - no need for me to mention names - but if the party president chooses them (as candidates), I will still support him. Thank you Tun," he said.

Najib also attempted to set an example of sacrifice to drive his message by drawing inspirations from his predecessor Abdullah, who is better known by his nickname Pak Lah.

"I am grateful to Pak Lah for his continuous support and two things. Firstly, he willing to relinquish his position as prime minister and president according to tradition in a good way and two - when passed on the baton to me, he said: 'I want to see you do better than I did,' he said.

"Why am I mentioning (them)... Because we will be going to the battlefield soon. When we go for war, we must have an army that is strong and united," he added.

Delegates made to pledge

After elaborating at length on house keeping issues, Najib trained his guns on Pakatan Rakyat, painting them as immoral and a threat to Islam.

Without naming Anwar Ibrahim, Najib spoke of his 1999 conviction for abuse of power and later sodomy, which was later overturned, while declaring Umno's struggle was true to Islam.

"Imagine our children losing their faith. Imagine a dark future for our children. A nation in chaos and its future gambled on. If we do not want this, then say no to PKR, say no to PAS, say no to DAP.

"Believe me, a vote for PKR is a vote for the destruction of our faith and social values, a vote for PAS is a vote for split among Muslims and a vote for DAP is a vote for oppression of our beloved race," he said.

The premier then led delegates, rights fist on their chests, to pledge their unity and

preparedness to defend Umno against the onslaught of what party leaders describe as the most challenging general election yet.

At a press conference later, Najib set the bar for BN, confirming that the ruling coalition is aiming to regain two-thirds majority in Parliament.

"That is our goal... We need the two-thirds majority and we will go all out for it," he said.

He expressed confidence that that the party can maintain the high morale from today until the campaigning period.

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