

BN ready to strike back to regain ground
Malaysiakini.com
Disember 3, 2010

The ruling BN is readying itself to strike back at the Opposition after losing some ground in the March 2008 general election, by re-inventing itself to be more inclusive, attractive and vibrant ahead of the next general election.

The bulk of this concerted effort will revolve around a new concept to touch the hearts and minds of the people, particularly the young, who form a substantial portion of the voters in the coming general election.

Spearheading the onslaught will be prime minister and BN chairperson Najib Abdul Razak.

Soon after taking office last year, Najib pushed for several initiatives to rebrand the BN, learning from the coalition's dismal performance in the 2008 polls and the subsequent few by-elections.

In February this year, a review committee consisting of members from the coalition with legal backgrounds headed by Umno vice-president Hishammuddin Hussein was established.

After nine months of vigorous studies and discussions, the committee came out with a 10-point BN charter, which is expected to be unveiled by Najib during the BN convention on Sunday - which, among others, will also touch on the need to move forward, transform economically and uphold religious freedom.

At the recent BN supreme council meeting, some changes were approved and adopted, among them is the direct membership, allowing those who are keen to join the BN to apply directly to become associate or affiliate members as well as to be the friends of the BN.

This means that they need not be members of any existing political parties in the coalition in order to be with the BN - a move which many BN component parties believe will encourage more people to support the coalition as direct members.

Not 'cosmetic makeover'

But in political analyst Khaw Voon Sze's opinion, the BN, in order to gain better grounds, must focus on reviving the true spirit of the coalition and not merely conduct "a cosmetic makeover" by introducing a new logo or a new charter or having direct members or support groups like "friends of BN."

"Recently, I had a chance to look at the speeches of the late Dr Lim Chong Eu when he decided to join BN. They touched on the whole BN spirit, centred on national interests and genuine power sharing.

"Gerakan's decision to join BN at that time was (primarily) due to national interests. Because of national interests and genuine power sharing, other parties in Sarawak and even PAS at that time decided to join the BN," he said.

It was important, therefore, for the coalition to emphasise the genuine concept of power sharing and show that whatever decision it took would be based on consensus and not dominated by any particular groups or members, he said.

Apart from the question of image, political observers say that there are still some challenges that the coalition needs to address before it can effectively prepare to strike back.

Gerakan secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow pointed out that the biggest challenge for BN was still how to project the coalition as one united front, working together and delivering results for the people.

"We have not been seen as working together as a single front," he said, adding that he felt that many people tend to believe that Pakatan had managed to project that it had a united front.

However, for LDP president VK Liew, the biggest challenge for the BN "is how to manage success" after the implementation of the direct membership initiative.

"Not only this poses a challenge to the BN but also to small parties when you have more members in these two categories - associates and affiliates. From now on, there will be no turning back and we have to move forward," he said.

Targetting different groups of voters

Observers believe that the success of the BN to rejuvenate itself very much depends on to what extent the people at large can understand the BN's charter and aspirations.

"Abdul Razak in 1974 decided to make a complete makeover on the symbol (of the then Alliance) to suit the environment then.

"Beside strengthening the coalition, BN must able to use this new tool to target different groups of voters," said political analyst Sivamurugan Pandian of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

He said BN needed to actively promote and ensure that the makeover was beyond cosmetic changes as he foresaw the need for the coalition to address some contentious points resulting from this makeover.

"People might question how university students, who cannot get involved in politics, can be encouraged to be friendly to political parties. At the end of the day, it is still a good start for the BN to overhaul its organisation," he said.

Another issue after the makeover will be whether members of the BN component parties will have the same spirit and willingness to change for the better to ensure their survival in the future.

"If the BN leadership leads the change, then the component parties must follow. They can have different ideologies and beliefs but at the BN level, they must be able to coordinate and enhance their cooperation to ensure that there is little internal bickering," said Sivamurugan.

"The new BN should also not deny the aspirations and needs of traditional voters. It shouldn't bring in drastic changes. There is need to balance BN's loyal supporters and attracting young voters at the same time.

"That's the big challenge," he added.

- Bernama.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/149877>

