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PM aims high to silence critics

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CHALLENGE: Najib vows to win Pekan constituency by 40,000 votes

KUALA LUMPUR

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has set for himself a high standard — winning the Pekan parliamentary constituency, of which he is the incumbent, by a 40,000-vote majority in the next general election. He is punching well above his weight by saying that.

But, as a consummate politician, he sees an opportunity that has presented itself to demolish his critics and silence them once and for all.

Najib is referring to Dr Mahathir when he said he was not afraid of people who had betrayed Umno after being its leader for 22 years.

“Should I be afraid of people who are already 92?” he asked the audience at the Pekan Umno annual general meeting on Saturday.

Najib is also urging Umno to aim higher, which he says must be united to defeat all its enemies.

For a man who was nearly defeated in the 1999 general election — winning Pekan by a mere 241 votes —



Najib defied logic by standing there in the 2004 general election and winning with a 22,922-vote majority.

He increased his majority to 26,000 and 35,000 in subsequent general elections.

His vow to get a 40,000-vote majority in the next general election is a distinct possibility, a political analyst said.

The fractured opposition makes Najib’s prediction well within reach.

Pas is on its own and keen to get its Hudud bill moving in Parliament, while being preoccupied with battling Datuk Husam Musa, who days earlier, joined their sworn enemy Parti Amanah Negara (PAN) and will lead PAN’s assault on Kelantan.

DAP is wrestling with a corruption charge against its secretary-general, Lim Guan Eng, a bombshell that opens all kinds of possibilities.

DAP, as a consequence, is more subdued, with little energy left for major political adventures.

“In the next general election, our aim is to safeguard as much of our

territory as is possible,” said a DAP leader.

PKR is also battling its own internal demons — between the factions led by its deputy president, Datuk Seri Azmin Ali, and another led by its president, Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

A much hyped, PKR-organised, anti-Najib Malaysia Development Bhd event in Sabak Bernam on Friday, attended by Parti Pribumi protem president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, drew hardly 500 people.

It failed to generate the heat and excitement that PKR had hoped for.

Najib’s Pekan dare is directed at Dr Mahathir and Parti Pribumi, not so much as to the spent PKR or Pas.

Speculation is rife among opposition circles that Pribumi might field a “big gun” in Pekan to defeat Najib and topple him.

Political analysts believe Najib is confident of increasing his majority because Pas, which had contested against him in 1999 and 2004, and nearly defeated him, is now inward looking and concerned about defending its Islamic credentials against PAN.

PKR had also stood against Najib, but fared poorly.

“We are willing to let Parti Pribumi do the fighting in Pekan,” said a PKR leader, who noted that Parti Pribumi has all the credentials of an Umno-

breakaway party to take on Najib.

“It is too early to say who in Parti Pribumi will contest, but most definitely, it will field a big gun,” he said, adding if the candidate manages to unseat Najib, then the party would have achieved its main aim of toppling Najib as prime minister.

But Najib is no pushover.

Only in 2004, the opposition, in this case Pas, came close to unseating him. That was understandable, given the political upheavals of 1999 and the disunity in Umno that caused Najib to lose ground. But he stayed put instead of running away to a safer constituency.

“Najib should worry more about internal Umno dissension than outside enemies like the opposition,” said a political analyst.

“He is confident that Umno is united and will not betray him, even if they now have an external enemy in Dr Mahathir and Parti Pribumi.

“Najib is banking on Umno closing ranks, what with ex-Umno leaders ganging up against it. The political developments in the country seem to favour him, too.”

Taking all these factors into account, Najib has made a calculated forecast of a 40,000-vote majority.

He might achieve it, or he might fail, but the important thing is, his majority will be as huge as in previous years.