

**Najib banks on track record, ideas for poll victory**  
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**By Jahabar Sadiq**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 10 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak is relying on his ideas, track record and hedging that Malaysians will prefer someone with experience at the helm against the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) novices for victory in the coming polls, say those familiar with the prime minister's campaign theme.

In his latest foray last night, the BN chairman asked Chinese voters on live national television to give his administration time to implement reforms as "the journey has already begun and we have accomplished much in the last three years" since he took power.

The Malaysian Insider understands that it is a theme that has been repeated to BN colleagues and also diplomats in the past few months as Najib (picture) prepares to lead his coalition to win back its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and the states lost in Election 2008.

It is also learnt that at least one BN component party, the MCA, is preparing a campaign to showcase Najib's leadership against PR leaders such as Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang and Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat. Several pro-BN websites have also been set up over the past few months that promote the current leadership against PR.

"The campaign is simple. Najib has the ideas and the track record that his foes don't have," an Umno warlord told The Malaysian Insider.

"Umno can show it has done so much since Merdeka. MCA will help this time by comparing Najib's leadership to those in Pakatan, most of whom are either too old or inexperienced for the job at hand," he added.

Diplomats who have been briefed by their Malaysian counterparts revealed that the country's sixth prime minister is banking on his reform plan and track record over the past three years.

"They're telling us that he is the best man for the job, be it in Umno or even outside the party," an European diplomat told The Malaysian Insider, adding he was also told that Najib needs his personal mandate to effect more changes or "transform the country".

"Some officials acknowledge there is resistance to Najib's ideas to transform the country but a good win can overcome those against him," another diplomat told The Malaysian Insider.

He said Najib is expected to discuss his ideas and reiterate his commitment to reforms when meeting British Prime Minister David Cameron this week and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev next week.

Analysts agree that Najib have done much in the three years since taking over from Tun Abdullah Badawi but point out that his "presidential-style campaign" has its pitfalls.

"There's no denying that Najib has been much more effective than Pak Lah is coming up with a comprehensive package across different levels on how he hopes to transform the country," political analyst Dr Ong Kian Min said, referring to the 1 Malaysia, Government Transformation Programme (GTP), Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) and New Economic Model (NEM) and the agencies to implement them such as Pemandu, TalentCorp, InvestKL and Agensi Inovasi.

But he said Najib's main challenges are that "he's running too much on a presidentialist platform so much so that it seems that his other cabinet members and BN leaders do not have ideas of their own" and "for every transformation policy he's tried to implement, he's also done a U-turn", citing the exclusion of the NEP in NEM Part, "talking about 1Malaysia but meeting with Perkasa and Pekida and still appealing against the Allah judgement".

Political scientist Dr James Chin said Najib's presidential style of campaigning may work in the rural areas but not in the urban areas.

"In the rural areas, the Umno machinery is strong and they can project Najib directly into the homes.

"The problem confronting Najib is that while his 1 Malaysia brand is strong, especially after giving out cash to low income families, voters may decide that they like Najib but dislike Umno. In such a situation, the most logical thing for the voter to do is not to vote or spoil the vote," said the academic from the Monash University in Sunway.

Chin also cautioned that Najib's campaign could blow back on him and cost him Putrajaya and his Umno presidency.

"The bigger problem is that if he performs badly in the GE, he will have to take the entire blame given that presidential type campaign. He cannot spread collective blame," he said.

Chin also said the MCA, MIC and Gerakan and the other BN parties appear to like Najib's presidential campaign in the run-up to the elections, especially the weekly visits to all states in the country.

"This way they do not have to ask the difficult question of how their own party president is doing. There are problems with the leaders of most the BN component parties," he added.

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