

PM: Tough to get two-thirds majority
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 20 — The prime minister admitted last night it would be difficult for the ruling coalition to secure a two-thirds parliamentary majority in the coming general election as the environment was more challenging.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak pointed out that in modern democracies, prime ministers would be “over the moon” to gain just a simple majority.

Najib speaking at the launch of the Foreign Correspondents Club Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur on March 19, 2012. — Picture by Choo Choy May
“It’s a different environment now. (You have) social media at work, you don’t have a monopoly as you had. People are more educated, free flow of information,” he said at the launch of the Foreign Correspondents Club Malaysia here.

However, Najib, who is Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, said the ruling coalition would work hard to get a super majority despite the difficult task before him.

He said it was important to have a stable government and not end up with a hung Parliament “or something that would spell political uncertainty for Malaysia”.

Najib will lead BN to the polls for the first time in the next general election, with political watchers saying he must better the coalition’s dismal 2008 showing and return its customary two-thirds majority in Parliament to remain in power.

The son of Malaysia’s second prime minister took over as premier from Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in April 2009, a year after BN suffered its worst electoral outcome ever, ceding 82 federal seats and four state governments.

Since assuming office, Najib has courted the Indian community — which abandoned BN in the last election — as well as voters in east Malaysia and rural Malays, both of whom seen as traditional vote banks for BN.

He has also announced a slew of law reforms, including the abolishment of the Internal Security Act (ISA) and other emergency ordinances, which were aimed at winning over the urban electorate.

A recent survey by the Merdeka Center showed that Najib’s popularity has risen 10 points to 69 per cent, on the back of an improving economy and RM500 cash handouts to low-income earners.

Nearly three-quarters of Malay voters polled expressed backing for the Umno president while he remained the least popular among the Chinese.

Support for Najib has steadily fallen since hitting a peak of 72 per cent in May 2010, sliding

to 69 per cent in November the same year before declining to 59 per cent in August 2011.

Analysts have cautioned, however, that the prime minister's high approval rating may not translate into more votes for BN, noting that while he remained popular the same could not be said of the ruling coalition.

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