

BN may go full-term, sorting out candidates list, say sources
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By Jahabar Sadiq

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 10 — Barisan Nasional (BN) may call elections as late as next year as Datuk Seri Najib Razak has yet to finalise the candidates lists and deal with incumbents who refuse to step aside for new talent, sources told The Malaysian Insider.

In the past week, the prime minister met his Umno officials at breaking-of-fast functions around the country, including last night in Terengganu, and briefed them on election preparations and saying he was confident of winning a two-thirds majority when elections are called.

“The issue now is the candidates list. Najib and his deputy, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, are trying to sort it out. Elections won’t be called until then,” said an Umno official who attended one of the breaking-of-fast events.

The Malaysian Insider had earlier reported that plans to dissolve Parliament this month have been shelved after two Sabah lawmakers quit the coalition and expressed support for arch-rivals Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

The BN chairman will visit Sabah this Saturday and announce the terms for a royal commission of inquiry investigating the rise of illegal immigrants there, a touchy issue in the state.

The Umno president has up to next April to call for the general election before the ruling coalition mandate expires five years after Election 2008 when it lost four states and the customary two-thirds majority in the 222-seat federal parliament.

“There are a number of veteran lawmakers who think they can still win but Najib has told them only winnable candidates will be selected. Some can’t accept this so it will take time,” the official said.

Another Umno warlord said Najib, who is also finance minister, hinted that more cash aid under the Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M) could be around the corner for Malaysians. Some 5.3 million households benefited from the programme earlier this year when they were each given RM500 to mitigate rising cost of living expenses.

“Najib is looking at one after the Budget and possibly another one around Chinese New Year next year,” the warlord said.

The Malaysian Insider understands that Najib has expressed confidence to his Umno colleagues that the defections of Beaufort MP Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin and Tuaran MP Datuk Seri Wilfred Mojilip Bumburing will not hurt Sabah BN, noting that Umno remains strong in the country’s easternmost state.

“He has said it publicly and also told us privately that the move by both Sabah lawmakers will not affect us at all. Sabah remains a fixed deposit,” said another official who attended one of the events. “The terms of the RCI should help us shore up support,” he added.

Despite Najib's optimistic outlook, Umno officials note that the party machinery around the country is not humming as it used to be and that many veterans are loath to step aside for new talent.

"Everyone wants to be a candidate and some of the veterans have told the PM they want to stay," one official said.

"The PM has just said his team will be a mixture of old and new," he added.

The Malaysian Insider has previously reported several dates had been considered for the polls including a firm September date that was moved after the Sabah defections.

BN sources also said they have already taken containers of coalition paraphernalia such as T-shirts and posters from warehouses in a few ports for distribution to all state chapters and divisions. It is learnt that some of the material was imported from China and Indonesia.

BN strategists are using Najib as the cornerstone of their campaign with banners, billboards and buntings featuring his face being strung along major roads and buildings in the capital city and other parts of the country. The KTMB commuter train has also had his face emblazoned on its carriages while party and coalition websites have his photos displayed prominently.

"Najib is popular. The last Merdeka Center survey has him with a 64 per cent popularity rating and he is reaching out to all demographics," a BN strategist told The Malaysian Insider.

When BN called the election in 2008, then prime minister Tun Abdullah Badawi's popularity rating was at 71 per cent but he lost the coalition's customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and four states.

Najib, who is seeking his first mandate at the polls, has been touring the country in his "Jelajah Janji Ditepati (Promises Fulfilled Tour)" over the past few months and is due to visit Kelantan and Terengganu soon for the campaign. Coincidentally, "Janji Ditepati" (Promises Fulfilled) is also the theme for this year's National Day on August 31.

A new campaign called "I Choose Malaysia" or "Saya Pilih Malaysia" has also been launched recently at a cost nearly RM40 million, said to be paid by BN supporters.

The supporters have also given the ruling coalition open cheques to hire cyber-troopers based in Damansara Perdana and Bangsar to use online sites such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs to further BN's agenda and campaign statements.

Nearly 13 million voters are eligible to cast their ballots if a general election is called involving all 222 federal seats and 505 seats in 12 states. However, the four PR-ruled states have yet to say if they will hold elections the same day as the general election as their mandates only expire next April. Sarawak has already had its state election last year.

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