

Anwar says Najib is formidable, but confident BN will not better 2008 results
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 1 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has agreed that Datuk Seri Najib Razak could prove a formidable political opponent in the coming polls but the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leader said he is confident Barisan Nasional (BN) will not improve on its Election 2008 performance.

He also pointed out that BN's weakest link appears to be its component members, suggesting that the ruling coalition's campaign had only succeeded in burnishing the Umno president's credentials.

Surveys have consistently shown that while the PM remains popular, the ratings are split among Malaysians for the government he leads.

"But they (BN) have a problem... Najib is not contesting in all the seats," Anwar (picture) told The Malaysian Insider yesterday.

Government sources told The Malaysian Insider earlier this week that the ruling BN coalition expects to win more than the 140 federal seats it took in Election 2008 despite the onslaught and talk by PR that it can capture Putrajaya in the next general election which must be called by the end of April 2013.

BN politicians concede that as many as seven parliamentary seats in Sarawak and six in Sabah are vulnerable to PR but maintain that their stronghold on rural areas remain strong. There are 222 parliamentary constituencies and 505 state seats up for grabs in the coming 13th general election.

Anwar said he was not surprised by BN's confidence ahead of the elections but the Permatang Pauh MP — who has said that the coming polls will be his last shot at power — was quick to take note of the ruling coalition's view that it may lose some key seats in Sabah and Sarawak to PR.

It is understood that BN is expecting to lose some of the seats held by four Sabah MPs who left the coalition while the urban Chinese sentiment in Sarawak could see those seats going to PR. In Election 2008, the DAP was the sole PR component party to win a federal seat each in Sabah and Sarawak.

BN politicians have also pointed out that they are expected to get back support from the Indian community, who number 1.7 million, as the coalition has been fulfilling their requests and also extended more aid to them.

Many Indians had blamed former MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu for their poor financial circumstances and turned their backs on him and BN in Election 2008. Samy Vellu also lost in his Sungai Siput stronghold in that election.

BN lawmakers The Malaysian Insider spoke to this week note that Najib's approval rating dropped only one per cent to 64 per cent in June although the government's approval rating

dipped to 42 per cent in the same month with a major drop in satisfaction coming from Malay voters.

They also pointed out that Najib's popularity has held despite the daily ceramahs around the country by PR politicians criticising the government on many issues.

The BN mandate expires in April 2013, leaving Najib just six months more to call elections.

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