

Najib tries to sniff out 'saboteurs' as Umno assembly ends
Malaysian Insider
December 01, 2012
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 1 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak closed the Umno general assembly tonight by posing to party members the “golden question” that has been reverberating throughout the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) all week — “if you are not chosen to contest the polls, would you fully support the candidate chosen by Umno-Barisan Nasional (BN)?”

The Umno president said this was the most crucial takeaway for members from the five-day meet, the ruling party’s last before the 13th general election, as he hinted to knowing of “batu ronson” (instigators) in the party whose loyalties were still questionable.

Najib’s speech was sharp and meaningful, laced with a clear warning to detractors that he would stop at nothing to weed out saboteurs to ensure Umno emerges victorious in the polls.

“As the prime minister, I get plenty of information,” the country’s sixth prime minister reminded an enthusiastic crowd at Dewan Merdeka tonight.

Najib (picture) told members that Umno’s enemies were “not very strong”, adding that he had confidence in the public’s support for the ruling party and BN.

Instead, he said he was more uncertain of Umno members.

“The one thing I am concerned about just a little... just a little. Only a little... Is the question of us,” he thundered.

“If I could conduct a survey, I would ask this golden question — if you are not chosen to contest the polls, would you fully support the candidate chosen by Umno-BN?” he said to a loud rumble among the over 2,000 delegates listening in rapt attention.

Najib told party members that there were five possible answers to the question - 1. Fully support; 2. Support; 3. Do nothing; 4. Sabotage; 5. Defect.

"So, I want you, ladies and gentlemen in this hall, on your journey home, in your cars or your express buses later, to tepuk dada, tanya selera (ask yourselves)," he said.

Najib noted the charged excitement in the hall from delegates but said this show of support may not last until the polls, as "sometimes, among us, there are batu ronson (instigators)".

"It is possible that everyone in this hall are loyal. But do not forget that there are former ministers, former deputy ministers who have turned rogue against the party.

"That is why... we must say, declare with loud voices that... even if I am not chosen, I will fully support the candidate chosen by Umno and BN," he said.

There was a chorus of "Can!" resounding across the cavernous Dewan Merdeka before Najib said that if the members were sincere in pledging their allegiance to the party, BN can return to power after the polls with its much coveted two-thirds parliamentary majority.

Najib later led delegates through an oath and a special prayer to lead Umno and BN into victory.

Umno has been working tirelessly to weed out internal saboteurs, whom it believes were largely to blame for the colossal losses BN had suffered during the last polls.

In Election 2008, the ruling pact had lost its traditional two-thirds parliamentary majority and ceded five states to parties that eventually formed the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) opposition pact. It later regained control of Perak following a series of defections.

In October, Najib announced the party leadership's decision to accord special powers to a new panel to take action against those who betrayed or attempted to sabotage the party or any other BN candidate.

Najib's mandate will end in April 2013, leaving the prime minister with just five months to call for polls.

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