

Najib presents BN's report card in 'State of the Union' tomorrow
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 18 — In keeping with a presidential approach to politics, Datuk Seri Najib Razak will table his Barisan Nasional's (BN) report card of initiatives and achievements in a "State of the Union" speech tomorrow night, say government officials.

His party officials and critics have pointed to Najib's presidential-style campaign since taking office in 2009 as a key factor to get votes in BN's Election 2013 campaign. The election is expected to be held within a month.

Calling it a "State of Union" speech similar to that done in the United States, ministers and officials say Najib will speak on achievements made in both the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) and Government Transformation Programme (GTP) that began in 2010.

"There will be economic and social markers to show how far we have come under the ETP and GTP. That is BN's track record," a minister told The Malaysian Insider on condition of anonymity.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Senator Datuk Seri Idris Jala had briefed senior editors and analysts last week on what Najib would touch on although the contents of the speech and report are embargoed until tomorrow night.

Najib himself has said he will need to show the report card for the ETP and GTP before calling elections to get his own personal mandate after taking over from Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in April 2009.

The country's sixth prime minister has appeared to be brimming with confidence ahead of the polls, disclosing last week Malaysia's Gross National Income (GNI) figures growing 49 per cent or US\$6,670 (RM20,677) to US\$9,970 between 2009 and 2011, although the numbers have been disputed.

While banking on economic figures to show progress under BN, Najib has also set several initiatives including cash handouts to the poor while focusing on creating jobs for the youths.

The prime minister's initiatives have made him more popular than his party and government, with the latest Merdeka Center survey showing his approval ratings are at 61 per cent last month, down from 63 per cent last December.

Both his government and party have been scoring just above 40 per cent approval ratings in similar surveys, reflecting his importance to BN's efforts to regain its customary two-thirds majority lost in Election 2008.

"BN needs him more than ever. The winnable candidates will rely on Najib to pull through, not the other way round," a senior BN politician told The Malaysian Insider, saying new faces will not have enough time to present their credentials to the voting public.

"Elections are likely to be held within a month and with 222 federal seats that have more voters than ever, how to be popular? We have to depend on Najib and his economic

figures," the politician said, adding this reflected the prime minister's presidential approach in carrying out his duties.

"It depends on him so I hope we win big," he added.

Some 13.3 million voters, including 3,000-odd abroad, have registered to vote in what is seen as the country's most-anticipated and closely-fought general election. The last general election was on March 8, 2008 but Najib has taken his time to dissolve Parliament.

The PM has up to April 28 before it automatically expires but sources say Parliament is likely to be dissolved within a week with elections in mid-April.

BN officials privately predict that the ruling coalition could get back its two-thirds majority although the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) pact led by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is also confident of a victory.

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