

Najib shows off BN's achievements, promises annual BR1M
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By Zurairi AR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 19 – Datuk Seri Najib Razak trumpeted his government's achievements for the past three years, and promised an annual Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia (BR1M) cash handouts scheme.

The prime minister also took the chance to attack Pakatan Rakyat (PR) in his National Transformation Programme (NTP) annual report speech today, reminding the public to continue the mandate of his Barisan Nasional (BN) government instead of voting PR in the upcoming polls.

"The people of Malaysia must choose between ... a government that will continue proven policies, or the other side who speak with a forked tongue, who take people's trust lightly," Najib said here when outlining the many achievements of the dual-pronged Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) and Government Transformation Programme (GTP).

"Choose a transformative government, not a destructive one."

The prime minister then proceeded to end his speech by announcing that the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M) initiative will continue to be an annual handout.

Second Finance Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah had announced earlier today that some 5.369 million of the 6.114 million people eligible for the BR1M 2.0 have cashed their vouchers as of yesterday.

BR1M has reportedly helped nearly five million families at a cost of RM2.6 billion last year, increasing Najib's approval ratings up to 69 per cent, largely due to a surge among lower-income households.

BR1M is a one-time handout of RM500 for Malaysian households earning RM3000 and below, and the second payout will be made this year under Budget 2013 with an allocation of RM3 billion and is expected to benefit 4.3 million households.

The move has been criticised as an attempt to sway votes for the upcoming general election, including the controversial remark by Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat who likened it to feeding livestock to garner support.

Najib also continued to ask Malaysians today to not gamble with their future by voting the opposition, which he claimed had failed to implement their manifesto in the last elections.

"If they have reneged on their old promises, then their new promises will be almost impossible to implement.

"Don't ever experiment with your future, because it will be hard to rise again from annihilation that was brought upon by a wrong choice," he warned.

Najib is banking on the feel-good factor of the ETP and GTP report cards, reportedly saying that he will need to show them 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.

Putrajaya announced today that the ETP has kept its momentum last year, and is on track in moving Malaysia towards achieving a high-income status by the year 2020.

According to the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu), with the current momentum, Malaysia is expected to reach a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of US\$15,000 (RM 46,840) by 2018, two years before its target of 2020.

Besides the target GNI per capita, Malaysia also needs to create 3.3 million jobs and secure US\$444 billion (RM1.3 trillion) in investments by 2020 in order to become a high-income nation.

Analysts have pointed out that the transformation initiatives under ETP and GTP contributed to Malaysia's GDP growth rate of 6.4 per cent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of last year.

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 PR pact led by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is also confident of a victory

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