

Despite prospect of being cut, BN leaders stay battle-ready
Malaysian Insider
April 10, 2013
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 10 – There was electrified excitement in the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) Merdeka hall this afternoon as Barisan Nasional's (BN) division leaders across all 222 federal seats nationwide huddled together for their chairman's final message to them before Malaysia votes this May 5.

Leaders met outside the hall said the mood was charged, and unlike what they have experienced in many past elections, even as Datuk Seri Najib Razak repeatedly reminded them that many may be cut from the contest, regardless their years of work.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi even said the leaders remained "cheerful" throughout Najib's speech, and that the response was overwhelming, indicating BN's readiness for the battle.

"I believe the machinery is well prepared to go to the warzone... to kill our political rivals," he said.

"But please don't misinterpret... warzone, meaning the general election and to kill, meaning to get them (the rivals) to lose in their seats," he added.

People's Progressive Party (PPP) president Datuk M. Kayveas had the same to say as he described the mood inside Dewan Merdeka when Najib delivered his message to BN leaders.

He said the speech had been explosive and the leaders were "hyped up" and ready for the contest, regardless who makes the cut.

"It is so much different from the past few elections... especially the last one. Everyone was hyped up, all gung-ho.

"There seems to be a revitalisation of BN," he said.

MCA Youth deputy chairman Datuk Dr Mah Hang soon said it was apparent that those gathered were more than willing to do their best this polls, whether it is to campaign as a candidate or for the selected candidate.

"I must say, they were... charged. Yes, I can see that. My feeling is that everyone wants to give their best to make sure BN wins with the most votes, the most majority," he said.

Some 13.3 million voters, including 5,200 abroad, are eligible to cast their ballots in Election 2013 to elect lawmakers in 222 federal and 505 state seats in 12 states. Sarawak already held its state elections in 2011.

The Election Commission (EC) announced today that the 13th general election will be held on May 5, and nomination day falls on April 20, which will signal the start of formal electoral campaigns that will last 15 days.

While the announcement was being made this afternoon, Najib was busying rallying his men in a final push to inspire his team before BN releases its candidates list several days from now.

Coming to the eleventh hour, Najib and his close associates have chosen to leave BN's candidates list as a guessing game among even the pact's more senior leaders, believing that this strategy would help stop internal sabotage during the actual polls.

It has been said that sabotage by disgruntled candidate hopefuls who failed to make the cut had been one of the major contributing factors to BN's colossal losses in the last 2008 general election.

Since speculation on the coming polls date started last year, Najib has been driving home his message of unity and the importance of fielding "winnable" candidates to BN members nationwide, telling them not to take their eye off the main prize, which is retaining power in Putrajaya.

Faced with a stronger and bigger opposition force this time, Najib's team believes that selecting the most qualified and able candidate would be the most important factor that would help drive BN's campaign through to the finishing line.

"I took the opportunity to tell them the few factors that we need to take into consideration in the division of seats and the identification of candidates so that they understand that this is a complex and complicated process and we are unlikely to be able to fulfil the wishes of all or to satisfy every individual," Najib told a press conference here after meeting with the leaders.

"It is impossible for this to happen," he firmly added.

Adding to this, Zahid said it was clear that BN has the numbers but its biggest concern is how its members respond if they fail to make the cut into the final list.

"BN has six million members nationwide. Voters number 13.3 million... so surely this gives us a strong basis for victory.

"But if the question of candidates become the main factor that disrupts the operation and process of campaigning, then this must be resolved," he said.

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