

**Najib: 'Long' campaign period shows democracy alive**  
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**By Syed Jaymal Zahiid**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 10 — The “long” 15-day campaigning period reflects a “healthy democracy”, said Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak today, even as party colleagues fret the “challenging” stretch may favour their rivals.

Most leaders polled by The Malaysian Insider immediately after the Election Commission (EC) announcement setting nomination on April 20 and polling on May 5 said the period would make Election 2013 tougher.

“The EC has made their decision, we accept it. The announcement means it (the EC) is trying to make a decision that reflects a healthy democratic process in Malaysia. We accept,” Najib told reporters after attending a closed-door meeting with BN division leaders at PWTC here today.

Some of BN leaders, however, said they were confident that the coalition could exploit the long campaigning time to zero in on every vote as it faces what is expected to be Malaysia’s closest fought elections since its independence in 1957.

“The long period, although challenging, will give us the time to present our candidates, focus on the groundwork thoroughly so we can win more than two-thirds majority and recapture the states we lost,” Umno information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan told reporters after attending the meeting.

“Even though it’s a bit long but that is the decision of the EC and we concur but there is an opportunity for BN to work on its weaknesses from the nomination period to the polling day and I hope the party will continue to work and strengthen itself,” Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said.

His Umno colleague, party information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan, echoed the view but said the stretch would allow BN to further reach out to voters.

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Former Perlis menteri besar Datuk Shahidan Kasim said although most in the coalition had expected the polling date to be earlier as well as a shorter campaigning period, BN was ready to take on its rivals.

“We had expected election to be the end of April but now we know it’s May. But whether or not the campaigning time is 12 or 15 days BN had always been ready,” he said.

But MCA Youth chief Datuk Wee Ka Siong disagreed the long stretch would be advantageous for BN.

“No. The longer you drag the more tiring but you have to face it,” he said, but added that the coalition will have to abide by the decision and “face it”.

MIC deputy president Datuk Seri S. Subramaniam shared Wee’s view and urged the party to

prepare to pace itself for the long campaign haul.

"To me it's too long but the decision has been made so we have to accept it. Accept and need to ensure that the resources from all aspects, including finances, will have to be stretched over two weeks of the campaign," he said.

The opposition and poll reform watchdog Bersih had, among others, called for a 21-day campaigning period as part of the push for free and fair elections, arguing that time allotted for previous campaigns was insufficient.

Its leaders claimed with its limited resources, a 21-day campaign would give them the time needed to court voters especially in states like Sarawak and Sabah where access to its deep interiors could be tough and financially taxing.

Most BN leaders argued today, however, that the formal 15 day campaign time is fair for both sides since, as it alleges, the opposition had already kickstarted its unofficial campaign months before today's announcement.

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