

Najib asks for stronger mandate to finish his job
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 – Datuk Seri Najib Razak appealed to Malaysians today for a bigger mandate in Election 2013, saying this would be the only way his team could complete the transformational policies he had put in place five years ago.

Making his polls pitch in a blog posting here, Najib (picture) trumpeted his administration's many achievements and successes since he took on the post of prime minister in April 2009, even saying his government was two years ahead of schedule to turn Malaysia into a high-income nation.

"Our track record shows that we are a government that delivers and keeps its promises. I want us to be proud of what we have achieved, and ignore those who try and talk Malaysia down," the prime minister wrote.

Without outlining specifics, Najib warned of the stark contrast between the likely future of the country under the present Barisan Nasional (BN) administration and an untested government led by the current crop of opposition leaders.

"One is pessimistic and divided, the other clear and optimistic," he said in the blog post. "One is unprepared and full of uncosted and empty promises, the other methodical and fully tested."

Najib, the nation's sixth prime minister, is heading for what is expected to be the most closely-fought polls contest in Malaysian history.

He will be facing Pakatan Rakyat (PR), the loose coalition of opposition parties DAP, PKR and PAS that has grown significantly in strength and in numbers since it was hurriedly formed after the last general election in March 2008.

Pundits believe that Najib, who still commands more popularity than the BN coalition he heads, will lead his team to victory in Election 2013 but may not recapture the two-thirds parliamentary majority that he needs to solidify his position in Umno.

This in mind, Najib has been training his sights on wooing support from the country's new crop of voters, numbering a staggering 3.9 million and who account for some 23 per cent of the current 13.3 million-strong electorate.

Under his rule, Najib's government has also offered financial relief to five million Malaysians suffering from high living costs through initiatives like the RM500 cash handouts under Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M), and the setting up of 1 Malaysia stores and clinics nationwide.

The prime minister reminded Malaysians of these programmes in his blog posting, and added that apart from that, his team has also established universal free primary education, introduced a minimum wage policy and even dismantled or amended preventive laws long deemed as draconian, such as the Internal Security Act (ISA), the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) and several emergency declarations.

Najib also noted that in keeping with his administration's pledge to be more transparent, 84 per cent of government contracts have been subjected to anti-corruption screening.

In terms of public amenities and safety concerns, the prime minister pointed to the 10 per cent drop in crime rate – a statistic often disputed by opposition figures – and the construction of over 3,500 kilometres of new roads.

"This is real change," Najib said. "But our national transformation is still only a story half told. With a strong mandate at this election, we can finish the job."

"It is in this spirit of learning and humility that I ask for your support as we seek to build a better nation."

In a televised address this morning, Najib announced the dissolution of the Dewan Rakyat, paving the way for the long-awaited 13th general election.

The Malaysian Insider understands that the polls may be held as soon as April 20 or a week later on April 27, depending on the Election Commission's (EC) arrangements.

The prime minister said he met with the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong this morning and received His Majesty's consent to dissolve Parliament. It is understood that 11 state assemblies will also be dissolved today and tomorrow to facilitate the general election. The Negri Sembilan state assembly was dissolved automatically on March 27 while Sarawak had its state election in April 2011.

The 59-year-old whose personal approval rating has remained above 65 per cent, has been on a whirlwind circuit around the country in the past few months to drum up support for his BN coalition in the run-up to election.

He has trumpeted his government's transformative achievements over the past three years and doled out money to diverse demographic groups in various cash schemes to aid some five million families feeling the global economic pinch.

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