

In Dr M, BN has a de facto campaigner-in-chief
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, April 5 — Ten years after leaving office, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and some of his old Cabinet colleagues have emerged in recent weeks as the face of Barisan Nasional's (BN) campaign to return to power in Election 2013.

The 87-year-old Dr Mahathir has become a de facto campaigner-in-chief, going on the stump with the vigour of a much younger man as BN faces what is seen as its stiffest challenge ever from the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) pact.

As Election 2013 moves into overdrive, Dr Mahathir has been the most visible face of the ruling coalition - apart from Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin - criss-crossing the country expounding on BN's power-sharing formula to drum up support for Team Najib.

The former prime minister who served for 22 years has been hitting the campaign trail hard in the past few weeks to bat for Najib, the son of his former political patron Tun Razak Hussein, in a way he never had for Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who succeeded him in October 2003, as he urged Malaysians to vote in the BN if they wanted continued stability and prosperity.

"Malaysians who love this country should uphold the only concept that can work in this multiracial country—the kongsi concept," the 87-year-old politician said in his column today in the New Straits Times daily.

"Only BN can provide this kongsi. The opposition simply cannot kongsi. A mandate for the opposition will be disastrous for Malaysia," he added, using the Malay word meaning "sharing" in the English-language newspaper to refer to the 13-party coalition's formula that has kept it in power at the federal level since the country's Independence in 1957.

According to Dr Mahathir, the three opposition parties that make up the PR bloc, has attempted to replicate the BN's power-sharing concept that has sustained Malaysia's political and economic stability and ensured the country's diverse racial and religious communities all get a slice of the pie.

"But theirs is not a kongsi. Theirs is a 'pakatan'," he said, using the Malay word meaning "pact" to refer to the PKR-DAP-PAS partnership as he strove to distinguish the two political blocs.

The three opposition parties have not registered their political partnership and as such, their candidates in the upcoming polls will be running under three different flags, unlike the BN which has a common banner—the widely-recognisable white scales on an indigo background—since its set-up in 1973 to succeed the Alliance front that brokered the country's emancipation from colonial British rule.

"Kongsi is about sharing. Pakat is about a temporary cooperation for a certain purpose. There is no give and take. There is no sharing," the Umno veteran said.

He said the pact was akin to a "conspiracy" and suggested that even if PR won Election

2013, the three parties would not be able to sustain its partnership and work as a true coalition government to take the country forward.

"Each will pull in its own direction," he said.

Despite his age, Dr Mahathir has been keeping a tight schedule touring every corner of the country, including across the South China Sea in remote villages in the two Borneo states of Sarawak and Sabah—the latter where a guerrilla war has been raging since February when Filipino Muslim gunmen claiming an archaic royal link invaded.

The fourth prime minister appears to be Najib's campaigner-in-chief as he fronts the BN's ceramah circuit to spread its power-sharing formula for stability as the world continues to be rocked by political and economic crises that have increased the number of jobless and created social unrest in Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

Senior members of the Mahathir Cabinet also appear to be ditching their low-public profile after retirement from the government to pitch similar messages and swing voter support for Najib.

Former Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin emerged from his political cocoon recently and advised Najib to axe the deadwood from within the current Cabinet.

The 74-year-old government pensioner's remarks appeared to be sharp criticism of the present administration, but Daim was also reported to have said that Najib was doing a "fairly good job" as the country's sixth prime minister and was confident the BN would win the elections.

Most recently, former Works Minister Datuk Seri Samy Velly was reported declaring himself a "winnable candidate" to stand for elections although he lost his Sungai Siput federal seat by a substantial 1,821-vote majority to political greenhorn and socialist Dr Michael Jeyakumar Devaraj in Election 2008.

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