

Parliamentary polls tripping Najib's presidential-style campaign, says analyst
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 19 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak's personal popularity might not necessarily translate to a big win in the May 5 polls, an analyst said today despite being the strongest brand for Barisan Nasional's (BN) Election 2013 campaign.

The caretaker prime minister's Umno party officials and critics have pointed to his presidential-style campaign since taking office in 2009 as a key factor to canvass votes, such as a penchant of appealing directly to voters without mentioning Umno or BN.

"There is a lot of expectation, hope riding on him ... The slight problem for the government is that it is a parliamentary system. You are not voting for a president but you are voting for the parties," Merdeka Center's executive director Ibrahim Suffian said in the "101 East" talk show hosted by international news channel Aljazeera, broadcast here this morning.

Ibrahim noted that while Najib has delivered some of the key reforms during his administration, his party does not carry the same goodwill and image in the eyes of voters.

Supporters of Najib have in recent months shown their affection for the caretaker prime minister by chanting "I love PM" and holding signs with the same message at his events.

Just yesterday, Najib capitalised on his popularity by asking civil servants to help him win Election 2013.

"I have never forgotten the deeds of civil servants ... If you love me, help me soon," Najib said yesterday to a crowd that held up "I love PM" signs.

While launching BN's manifesto this month, the BN chairman asked coalition supporters who they placed their trust in to lead the country: Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Anwar's ally PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang or himself.

The massive crowd dressed in BN's signature blue then responded by standing up and continually chanting loudly "Najib! Najib!"

Last month, The Malaysian Insider reported Najib took a leaf out of US President Barack Obama's first presidential campaign in 2008 by appealing directly to first-time Malaysian voters with an "Action Kit" sporting a "We support Najib Razak" slogan.

Najib's presidential tone ahead of GE13 has also been apparent with his "State of the Union" address — similar to the US — when he announced last month his government's report card and achievements under the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) and Government Transformation Programme (GTP).

The caretaker prime minister's initiatives have made him more popular than his BN government, with the latest Merdeka Center survey showing his approval ratings at 61 per cent in February, down from 63 per cent last December.

Both his government and party have scored just above 40 per cent in similar surveys, reflecting his importance to BN's efforts to regain the customary two-thirds majority it lost in Election 2008.

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