

**In GE13 blitz, Najib pledges 1m affordable homes nationwide for mandate**  
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GEORGE TOWN, May 1 — Seizing on rising discontent over high property prices amid low wages among city folks, Datuk Seri Najib Razak has promised to build one million affordable houses across the country in the next five years in return for the urban vote.

The Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman's coalition wants to win the May 5 general election with a convincing two-thirds parliamentary majority that was lost in Election 2008 when urban voters switched to the parties that now make up Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

Under gloomy skies, the caretaker prime minister focussed on affordable housing in a whistle-stop tour of Penang while introducing BN candidates to crowds largely made up of supporters and party workers yesterday.

"We promise one million affordable houses. But they promise, not one million, not 500,000 but just 150,000," Najib said as he compared both coalition's manifestos to a large crowd at the Penang riot police base in the Rifle Range residential area.

The working-class neighbourhood is the largest low-cost housing scheme in the island state, with nine 17- and 18-storey concrete blocks built in 1969 when the then opposition Gerakan won power. Gerakan is now part of BN and party secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow is the state coalition chief.

In Penang, Najib pledged to build 9,999 affordable flats in three DAP strongholds around the Rifle Range area, which is to be redeveloped from the 3,735 units into 4,800 units when combined with the police base land. The policemen are to be moved elsewhere.

He then asked the voters to elect the BN candidates to ensure the projects take off, saying "I have trust and confidence in this BN team to bring real change to Penang."

Affordable housing has been a priority for Najib, whose government set up the PR1MA or People's Housing 1 Malaysia agency to develop projects that cost RM400,000 for those earning RM3,000 monthly, who form a majority of urban voters and residents in Malaysia.

Housing has also been a major issue among voters, according to independent pollster Merdeka Center whose January survey showed 24 per cent of those interviewed rated "affordable housing" as an issue.

On mainland Penang, Najib told rural residents that his coalition was focussed on helping solve people's problems rather than grandiose mega projects such as a tunnel connecting the island to the mainland proposed by caretaker Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng's government.

"We want to help the people and that is why affordable housing is important," he told party workers in Penaga, where his coalition's new faces are facing candidates who have worked the ground the past few years.

"We will abolish the tunnel when we win the state. There is already a second bridge being

complete. Why the hurry for the tunnel?" he asked rhetorically to applause from the crowd that was mostly clad in the coalition's blue T-shirts.

The promise of affordable housing has also been repeated elsewhere in Najib's blitzkrieg to shore up support in several key federal and state seats in Election 2013.

Just two weeks ago, the BN chairman launched the 1 Malaysia Civil Servants Housing Programme with houses priced from RM150,000 to RM300,000 in administrative capital Putrajaya.

The government will build 10,336 units of between 1,000 sq ft and 1,500 sq ft with the first phase would be located in Precinct 11 and Precinct 17 to be completed in 18 months.

There are also similar initiatives in other states, including in Malay-majority Negri Sembilan and Johor, as BN pins its hopes on getting enough support to continue its 56-years of unbroken rule in the country this Election 2013.

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