

**Perception is BN's biggest problem, says Najib**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 3 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak admitted today that his government's most pronounced weakness is in battling public perception, particularly in the online world where he alleged the public is being misled by anti-Barisan Nasional (BN) elements.

The prime minister told a monthly gathering of the Prime Minister's Department this morning that the administration needs to identify better ways to defend itself from this negative perception.

"Perception can be formed in many ways. Maybe not through face-to-face meetings, but through Facebook.

"If there is any weakness in the government, it could be that we are not so good in dealing with the war on perception," he was quoted as saying in The Star Online this morning.

Najib, who was just recently sworn in for his second term as prime minister, has been struggling to fight off the barrage of criticisms against him and his team since the close of the 13th general election on May 5.

He had led the ruling pact to victory but it was a short-lived celebration for the embattled BN chairman as he had recorded three major failures despite the polls win — failure to recapture the country's richest and most industrialised state of Selangor, failure to recapture BN's customary two-thirds parliamentary majority, and failure to win the popular vote.

When BN lost its two-thirds majority in the 2008 polls, former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had little choice but to step down a year later, handing over the reins of the country to Najib in April 2009.

This time, however, it is believed that Najib may not have to walk in the footsteps of his predecessor by giving up the premiership as the leader may likely prevail when Umno holds its internal party polls this year-end.

According to former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, this is because there are no other leaders more capable than Najib to lead the country for the time being.

But even if Najib is hailed as prime minister in BN and in the hallowed hallways of Putrajaya, his leadership has been taking a severe beating in the cyberworld, where the bulk of pro-opposition Malaysians have been keeping the candle for Pakatan Rakyat (PR) burning bright.

Even before the polls, Najib admitted that Election 2013 would be Malaysia's first "social media election", saying that sites like Facebook and Twitter would be a key battlefield to BN's defence of Putrajaya.

"The coming months will be a fascinating period for people in both politics and the Internet.

"I can confidently predict that this will be Malaysia's first 'social media elections'," the BN

chairman had then said.

Najib himself has more than one million followers on Twitter and some 1.2 million "likes" on Facebook.

He had also admitted that the social media could be a double-edged sword for his party Umno, conceding that the net was among the chief causes of BN's record loses in the last polls.

Political analysts have said that Malaysians are turning more to the Internet to get information, which has led to politicians setting up Facebook and Twitter accounts to reach out to voters, bypassing mainstream media that has seen lower newspaper circulation and smaller broadcasting audiences.

There are currently about 13.6 million Facebook users in Malaysia out of a 28.3 million-strong population, which is a 48 per cent penetration of the population, according to monitoring website socialbakers.com.

According to the Oxford Internet Institute, Malaysia, along with Brazil, has the highest Twitter use in the world.

A total of 29 per cent of Facebook users in Malaysia are aged between 25 and 34 years.

Najib has about 1.3 million fans on his Facebook page compared to Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's 428,371 Facebook fans.

Analysts said much of PR's success came from its pivotal early recognition and exploitation of the Internet as an effective campaigning platform.

To this day, the Internet is still seen an opposition-dominated domain.

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