

Malaysia very different from Egypt, says Najib
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While there has been an outpouring of congratulatory messages from thousands of Malaysians to the people of Egypt over their new-found 'liberalisation', Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak drew a line on the similarities, or lack of them, between the two countries.

"Firstly, we cannot equate what is happening in Egypt with Malaysia because things are very different in the two countries," he said when asked what Umno and BN could learn from the middle eastern country.

The premier also later said that it is the BN's 'People First' policies that will ultimately be the main difference between Malaysia and former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's 30-year regime.

"We have known since early on that we need to put the people first. So whatever we do in our plans and our policies, we prioritise the people. And if we do that, the people will be with the government.

"But this doesn't mean that everything will be overcome in the blink of an eye. The people will also understand that as long as we put the people's interest first and understand the desires of the people, they will feel the effects and benefits by the government," he said.

Najib had previously warned against any attempt to usurp political power in Malaysia, using demonstrations like those in Egypt.

"Don't think that what is happening there must also happen in Malaysia. We will not allow it to happen here," he was reported to have said in the Star earlier this week.

'The government cannot ignore social media'

Triggered by the revolution in Tunisia just earlier this year, the Egyptians, who had a deep-rooted distrust in Hosni Mubarak's government, were quick to mobilise street protestors and demonstrators.

Using social networking media such as Facebook and Twitter, anti-establishment sentiments spread throughout the entire country like wildfire, and Mubarak's 30-year rule crumbled after 18 days of incessant protests.

The Najib administration is also sitting up and acknowledging the influence of social media.

"This is to be expected. This is a part of the global phenomenon. So we have two options - we can either close Malaysia to the global phenomenon of using Information Communication Technology (ICT), or we can be a part of it. And we chose to be a part of it.

"That's why we have to manage (this phenomenon), and that's why we have a society that is educated and technologically-savvy.

"Therefore, the challenge is for the government to manage the new political environment. It is not going to be easy because we don't have a monopoly over the information nor its

dissemination.

"In fact, over social networking, information can be disseminated in real time, even if the views aren't correct. But it can be disseminated quickly," he said.

However, he was quick to point out that he was not referring to Internet censorship.

"I'm talking about engaging with people so they understand government policies. Because sometimes, our intentions are good but people end up getting the wrong idea of what we do," he said, referring to the protest against the 100-storey tower which had resulted in a popular Facebook page.

Najib himself has appeared to embrace social networking, having a Facebook page of his own as well as a Twitter account, which he claims he handles personally.

Move to quell Umno infighting

Speaking at a press conference in between meeting Umno division leaders in Kuala Lumpur this afternoon, Najib had also said that the gathering is a part of Umno and BN's political transformation plan, as well as lending ear to grassroots grouses.

However, he acknowledged that there were complaints of factionalism among several divisions in the party.

"There are always internal problems with political parties. But it is not to the extent of paralysing the party. Unlike some other parties out there, no one is also leaving Umno," he said, playing down the complaints.

"What we want to repair is the difference of opinion in some divisions. We may not be able to fix it 100 percent, but I'm certain that we can cool this so that it does not affect the performance of the divisions.

"In any democracy there will be competition, and we have to face that reality," he said.