

Chinese should not be bystanders, says Najib
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Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has urged the Chinese community not to be bystanders and support his various transformation agendas.

"It is important for them to be on board, to support this journey towards transforming Malaysia.

NONE"It is important for them to support it and not take the attitude (of) 'Look, let's wait and see'. You know? 'Let us (watch) on the sidelines'.

"(This is) because this transformation agenda will not happen, will not take place, without the support of the people," he said.

Najib said that he was confident that his transformation agenda can be realised should it receive the support of all Malaysians.

He was speaking during his maiden televised interview geared towards the Chinese audience on ntv7 tonight.

The interview - titled 'Chat time with Najib' - was hosted by newscasters Lee Siad Huey and Owen Yap.

PM plays it safe

Throughout the 90-minute interview, the pair had gone through an extensive list of issues which has been extensively covered by the Chinese media.

This includes the Jalan Sultan land acquisition plans, Lynas rare earth refinery and the shortage of Chinese-educated teachers.

The premier did not provide any new information on these issues but instead repeated earlier government positions and was non-committal in some instances.

For example, when asked if his administration would require Lynas to dispose its waste material abroad, Najib replied with a curt: "That is our preferred position".

Najib reiterated his earlier stand that the government will not compromise on the health and safety of the public.

He also stressed that his government will decide on the issuance of a operating licence to Lynas based on the outcome of a parliamentary select committee probe and the suit initiated by a group who are against the refinery.

Dodges UEC poser

On fair treatment to Chinese schools, Najib again highlighted his contribution to the Chinese education during his tenure as the education minister during the 1990s when he removed the legal provision that empowered the minister to convert vernacular schools to national schools.

NONEHe also claimed that a clear legal pronouncement was made during the time, declaring Chinese schools as an integral part of the national education system.

Najib described it as a "landmark decision".

When the hosts pressed further on official recognition for the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC), adopted by all Chinese independent high schools as a A-levels equivalent, Najib did not provide any commitment.

Instead, he suggested that the authorities should hold discussions with Chinese educationists on ways to 'localise' the curriculum for independent Chinese schools and improve Malay proficiency among their students.

The secret Coca-Cola recipe

On Bersih 2.0's demands for the next general election to be held only after proper electoral reforms have been instituted, Najib was again non-committal.

He said that his administration will do its best to improve the electoral system.

NONEHe repeated his earlier position that Malaysian elections have been conducted in a clean and fair manner, and his administration shares the same objective as Bersih 2.0, that is to strengthen the system.

"We don't want to be elected on the basis that we rig or manipulate the election," he said.

Quizzed on the election date, Najib replied with his oft-repeated 'Coca-Cola' joke that the timing of general polls is as big a secret of the recipe for Coca-Cola.

Chinese support lacking

When Lee mentioned that many parents plan to have their overseas vacation during the coming school holiday in June, but are worried that they might miss the chance to vote, Najib had his tongue firmly in his cheek.

NONE"If they are so worried, they should go somewhere nearby. Holiday in Malaysia," said the premier.

On a serious note, Najib conceded that Chinese support for BN is the lowest among all races, but he refused to reveal how much, in terms of percentage, of the Chinese votes that he is eyeing.

He was confident that continuous engagement with the Chinese community will slowly turn things around.

Commenting on the perception that Umno has overshadowed other component parties in BN, Najib attributed it to the huge disparity in terms of seats won by the party during the last general election.

'Give BN more time'

He stressed that BN has managed to introduce fairer and more inclusive policies as a result of robust consultation among component parties.

To back his argument, Najib cited the Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia scheme where RM500 was disbursed to low-income groups from all races, and the new criteria for public scholarship which emphasised merit and socio-economic status instead of ethnicity.

He claimed that these policies were fully supported by Umno, showing that the largest ruling party has embraced change and reform.

However, Najib reminded the audience that it takes longer time to change people compared to policies.

"I can assure you if people give us the mandate for the next five years, we can achieve even much more.

We will make the reform, even BN, we will reform within BN," he added.

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