

Najib admits he's flummoxed
MalaysiaKini.com
9 Disember, 2012
Oleh Terence Netto

COMMENT Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's disconnect from reality is now so stark he, too, cannot hide it any more.

After starting out as a reformer by initiating much-trumpeted transformation programs of government, the economy, and of his political party, he has unfurled the white flag of defeat: he's asked the electorate to give him a mandate to reform Umno.

That's putting the cart before the horse.

Since Umno sits at the focal point of the body politic, asking for a national mandate to reform the party he leads is tantamount to admitting that he has tried and has failed to change things at the fulcrum of political society in the country.

It's an abject admission of failure from a reigning leader in the final prelude to an election that could well end in not only his party's but also his ejection which is certain even if he wins the polls - unless, of course, he does that with plenty to spare which is unlikely.

Najib's plea for a mandate from the national electorate in order to reform his own party is proof irrefutable that he has tried and has failed to shift his home base.

Before one can vet his plea one has to listen to it in his own words.

In an interview published in the Malay Mail Friday last, he said: "If I want to reform the party, I need a mandate from the people. Without a mandate from the electorate how can I reform the party?"

The PM has got things precisely the other way round.

Instead of demonstrating to the country his capacity for national leadership by steering his party in the path of reform, he wants the country's voters to give him an endorsement at the coming general election so that he can change his party's decrepit mores.

The equivalent situation would be if India's PM, Manmohan Singh (left), widely regarded as a clean politician at the helm of a corruption-sodden party, requests his country's electorate to give him another term at the top so that he could then be empowered to tackle endemic corruption in Congress.

Unlike Najib, Manmohan has not described his dilemma in the same way the Malaysian leader has, but he has presided over a situation in a fashion that evokes some lines from the poet W B Yeats - "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate

intensity."

Wobbled and stalled

Certainly, Najib has lacked conviction in the face of opposition from within Umno to his agenda of reform.

Whenever he faced opposition to what he said he intended in both the economic and political spheres, he wobbled and stalled rather like his predecessor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi did.

The difference between Najib and Abdullah was that the latter backpedaled after he had received a resounding endorsement at the 2004 polls whereas Najib, after dithering on his reform agenda in the now 44 months of his tenure, is asking for an endorsement from the people at his first test at the polls in order to beat back the forces of reaction.

There is a gap in Najib's logic. What happens if after obtaining that endorsement, reactionary factions in Umno interpret the mandate as support for the status quo in party and government which means that reform would then not be necessary and that it should be business as usual?

How is Najib going to deflect this interpretation unless of course he contends that the mandate obtained is personal and that it is for the holder to use accordingly?

True, Najib has been personalising his coalition's campaign to such an extent that the 'Najib brand' has begun to transcend the 'BN brand'. Witness these days the plethora of 'I love PM' and 'I love Najib' campaign paraphernalia on the BN hustings.

Selling points

Capitalising on the 'new broom sweeps clean' aspect that the electorate would reasonably be said to afford a newly-installed PM, Najib has been steadily detaching his selling points from that of the BN's.

But his induction period of now nearly four years is too long a span for a new PM to stay fresh for effective new broom leverage.

Four years is the term of a democratic government's mandate; it's too long a probation period to allow a new PM.

Furthermore, Najib has declined to take the move that would have sealed his personalising of the BN campaign - he has weaseled out of the challenge to debate Pakatan Rakyat supremo Anwar Ibrahim (right).

Najib has taken a presidential tack to his role as BN chairperson and prime minister of the country. But he declines to take the route to its American lengths by disdaining the one

feature - a head-to-head debate - that distinguishes the US brand.

In other words, Najib wants to have his cake and eat it, too. That's allowed in dictatorships, not democracies.

Najib's problem is that he traffics in the jargon of democracy but is a stranger to its real meaning and content.

A coalition's supremo does not plead with the electorate for a mandate to reform its dominant member; he reforms it first and invites voters to empower him to extend the effort nationwide.

The PM is thoroughly bamboozled.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/216260>