

**The Chinese owe BN nothing**  
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**By Kee Thuan Chye**

COMMENT Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, the vendor of half-baked spin, was at it again a few days ago when he said the Chinese owed their success to the BN.

At a 1Malaysia open house, he said BN formulated good policies and ensured there was harmony in the country and an environment that "allowed the Chinese to make a good living".

Najib had the cheek to say this.

He of course wants the Chinese to be thankful to BN and therefore vote for the coalition in the coming general election. But his half-baked spin completely ignores the other side of the story.

For instance, the Chinese also owe it to BN that they became second-class citizens in their own country because of BN's discriminatory policies - and, let's not forget, practices.

As a result, the Chinese have to work harder to succeed. To get places in Malaysian public universities. To have their children score the highest number of As and still not get accepted to do, say, Medicine, in these institutions. And therefore be forced to send them overseas at a much higher cost.

The Chinese owe it to BN that they were compelled to leave Malaysia to seek fairer opportunities overseas, some never to return, and thereby contributing to a huge brain drain for which Malaysia is now paying the price.

Many who are now settled overseas may indeed be thankful that they left, but I'm sure Najib is not looking to them for gratitude. Some of them won't be eligible for voting, anyway, having taken citizenship in their countries of adoption.

The Chinese also owe it to BN that to take on business projects of sizable proportions, they have to pay kickbacks - some to BN bigwigs themselves, some to their cronies.

Impossible to rise to highest echelons

The Chinese owe it to BN that they find it virtually impossible to rise to the highest echelons of public service - in the judiciary, the military, the police, the universities, the civil service. Not because they don't have the merit to fill these positions; in fact, they do, which therefore makes it even more unjust and painful.

Can Najib name a single Chinese vice-chancellor in a Malaysian public university? Can a

Chinese person become inspector-general of police or admiral of the fleet or chief justice?

Najib should note that despite the barriers, the Chinese accepted their lot. And many Chinese - for whatever warped or bewildering logic - actually supported BN throughout the times they were marginalised!

Najib should watch what he says in the run-up to the general election, especially if he is hoping to win Chinese support for BN.

As it is, many analysts believe that about 70 to 80 percent of the Chinese are not in favour of the ruling party. If he wants to win at least some over, he needs to say the right things. More than that, he needs to do the right things. Although even then, one wonders if it might not be too late.

Many Chinese still remember what he reportedly said in 1987, on the eve of Operasi Lalang at the Umno Youth rally in the TPCA Stadium. As the Umno Youth chief then, he displayed ethnocentric gusto in unsheathing his keris and announcing that it would taste Chinese blood.

It might have been an act of foolish bravado, but it still resonates among some Chinese today. Considered together with the video that is making the rounds again of his address to the Umno and Malay NGOs audience at Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) a few days after Bersih 2.0, in which he said, with much tribal sound and fury, "We will show them whose country this is!", many wonder if the leopard has changed its spots.

For all his talk of 1Malaysia, Najib is still an ethnocentrist at heart.

He has said he will meet the Chinese educationist group Dong Zong to discuss its demands in regard to Chinese education. In all likelihood, he will agree to meet some, if not all of them, as a last-ditch measure to win Chinese votes. He might well declare the government's recognition - finally - of the United Examination Certificate (UEC), a dream the Chinese educationists have been pursuing for the longest time.

Be wary of Najib's sweet talk

If this consequently prompts Dong Zong to endorse Najib and BN for the coming general election, it could sway a good number of Chinese votes in the direction of BN. Then, like they did in 1999 when they saved Dr Mahathir Mohamad's bacon by strongly supporting his coalition when the Malays were swinging away from him, they could hand BN a victory... and, who knows, maybe even a two-thirds majority, which is what Najib desperately covets.

However, this is going to be a crucial general election. It is the one time when real change for the country can come about with a change of government.

The Chinese need to consider carefully about giving their vote to BN. They need to consider the long-term effects of another BN victory. They need to weigh the possibility of real

reform in the event of BN being booted out and a new coalition taking over that could bring positive change.

They need to be wary of Najib's sweet talk and his gifts. If he gives them government recognition of the UEC, more independent Chinese schools, whatever, they might want to just accept these politely, say thank you and think of voting according to what they think is right.

Dong Zong, on its part, should remain neutral and not take a stand by endorsing BN. For if it does and Pakatan Rakyat wins the general election, it would find itself in an awkward position.

The Chinese have a big role to play now in this coming general election. Najib can say anything till he is blue in the face, but they have to weigh the truth or lack of it in what he says.

Above all, they must not forget about the corruption that has been rampant under BN rule for decades. And the rent-seeking. And the slow growth of our GDP since 1980 in comparison with South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, etc. These affect the whole country, not just the Chinese, and are therefore all the more important.

When it comes to the crunch, the Chinese must vote for only one thing - a better Malaysia.

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