

## **Najib's brother recalls dad's frugal ways**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**Jan 14, 2014**

Second prime minister Abdul Razak Hussein was so careful with public funds that he gave his young sons a tongue lashing when they asked for a swimming pool at the official residence.

"My father made it abundantly clear that while Seri Taman may be our home, the house belonged to the government and, hence, to the people.

"Anything spent on it would have to come from public funds, and there was no way he was going to allow the state coffers to be depleted on something as frivolous as a swimming pool.

"'What will the people think?' he thundered," Nazir Abdul Razak recalled in a commentary on his father published by several news organisations today, on the 38th anniversary of Razak's (back, second from right) untimely death.

In the touching piece, the now CIMB Group chief executive officer said Razak also rarely took his family on official trips overseas, and if he did, their fares and expenses came out of his own pocket.

The second PM was so frugal that he did not even allow his wife to accompany him to Europe in October 1975 when he received his final medical treatment, to save his own money for fear of the family's financial situation in his passing.

"She only managed to join him weeks later on the insistence of the cabinet and with a specially-approved government budget for her travel.

"His integrity was another trait that came up often in conversations. He was guided by what now seems a somewhat quaint and old-fashioned concept of public service; that a public servant is first and foremost a servant of the people whose trust must never be betrayed," he wrote.

'People First before it became a sound bite'

The youngest brother of now PM Najib Abdul Razak (right), Nazir was only nine when his father passed away and relied on anecdotes from his father's peers to fill in the gaps.

Many of these peers, he said, were astonished to know that Razak was suffering from leukemia when performing his duties as he was always on the move and going to the ground.

"Of course, few people forget to recount Razak's dedication to rural development. He was 'People First', long before the sound bite," he said.

"People First, Performance Now" is his brother's tagline which accompanies Najib's signature policy 1Malaysia.

While this is Nazir's only direct allusion to his brother's administration, his recollections of his father's strict adherence to good governance may come in contrast with recent news involving the prime minister and his wife.

Malaysians last year balked at official residence Sri Perdana's utility bill of RM2.2 million 2012 while opposition lawmakers took the government to task for giving the green light to Najib's wife Rosmah Mansor to use the official jet for a speaking engagement in Qatar.

Parliament was told that trips taken using the government's seven private aircraft cost about RM490,000 per trip on average in 2012.

Go back to the start

Meanwhile, Nazir said that Razak's peers mostly recall how the much-loved second PM was a prime minister for all Malaysians.

"(Above) all, what they unanimously emphasised was Razak's commitment to national unity - towards building a nation where every single one of its citizens could find a place under the Malaysian sun," he wrote.

By introducing the New Economic Policy, he said, his father tried to tackle poverty through spawning a Malay middle class and avoid another May 13 race riot.

Nazir, who has criticised race-based affirmative action before, clarified that it is the implementation that has "gone awry".

"The fixation on quotas and the seemingly easy route to unimaginable wealth for a select few have created an intra-ethnic divide in class and status, while fueling inter-ethnic tensions.

"Both these developments serve to undermine, if not completely negate, the overarching goal of Razak's NEP, strengthening national unity," he said.

Today, he said, inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic tensions are "once again approaching worrying levels".

"What can be done? There is a Malay proverb: 'Sesat di Hujung Jalan, Balik ke-Pangkal Jalan'. Loosely translated, it means "When one has lost one's way, one should return to the beginning.

"And 'the beginning' here, in my view, is the values, commitment, vision and inclusiveness demonstrated and embodied by Razak," he said.

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