

Credit is due - Najib learnt lessons from MH370
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MH17 Disasters occur with the smallest margin of mistakes. A crisis cannot be averted from happening, but crisis management can save any crisis from escalating. And more often than not, leaders of countries get credit for how they handle a certain crisis, and this boosts their credentials.

On one too many an occasion, Najib Abdul Razak has been left wanting when it comes to showing leadership in a country that is becoming increasingly divided due to right-wing NGOs, extremism, and a constantly hostile political situation.

The number of occasions where Najib showed his real capabilities were few and far between, such as the announcement to abolish some old laws as part of his transformation programme, only to allow his ministers to re-introduce preventive detention two years later.

His silence on the rise of the right-wing agenda that has dominated the very party he leads is a matter that cannot be overlooked. In March, his leadership fell under the spectre of widespread international criticism following the MH370 crisis.

Najib took too long to weigh-in on the crisis actively, and appoint a coordinated team to be the face of the Malaysian authorities.

By that time, half of the damage was done, as ministers overlapped one another, and several department heads made conflicting statements that contradicted one another - sending the media into a loop.

From thereon, there was only further damage to Najib's credentials - and Malaysia's - in handling the crisis. The foreign press began paying attention to Najib's lack of domestic leadership, and linked it to the country's handling of the MH370 crisis.

Statements such as that of the flight "ending" in the Southern Indian Ocean did not help, which angered some victims' families as they were unable to conclude a proper closure from Najib's seemingly vague statements.

The government's hesitation to discuss MH370 issues in Parliament, except for recording a note of sympathy, further worsened the disconnect of information when there were plenty of questions being asked as to where Malaysia went wrong.

And, we still do not know fate of MH370

It was easy to assume we did do something wrong to cause the disappearance of the flight - but the fact remains that until now, we do not know what has happened to the Beijing-bound flight and with every passing day, the chances of us getting the full story grows slimmer.

But if anything, Najib's reaction to the latest tragedy that struck Malaysia through MH17 was a world away from the crisis handling speed of MH370.

He was the face of everything regarding MH17 from the beginning. He addressed the nation at the wee hours of morning once the news filtered in, and held press conferences at odd hours to continuously update the country, and by extension the world, of the latest developments.

He was on the case from the moment the crisis hit. There was a clear distinction as to who was in charge. He sent his transport minister and foreign minister to Ukraine, but he remained in the country in an attempt to continue to use multi-pronged diplomatic channels to get things done.

While his team as in Ukraine, Najib used various channels to try and pave the way for the rescue workers to do their job at the crash site in Eastern Ukraine.

Najib's refrain paid off handsomely?

While the US President Barack Obama and leaders from his ally countries were busy pointing fingers at Russia for the tragedy, Najib refrained from finger pointing, and this seemed to have paid off handsomely.

Without making any enemies or hostility, Najib opened a channel where he was able to communicate with two major superpowers who are at loggerheads, and found a solution for the issue.

As the crash of MH17 is being heated up as a geopolitical conflict between US and Russia, it was easy to assume that Malaysia, already suffering as an unwilling participant in the Ukrainian crisis, would not get things done its way.

But without playing the waiting game, the government seems to have got what it wanted, without antagonising any side.

It is a rarity for Malaysians at large to say that their government has done the right thing. But this was a moment of fame for Najib in the international arena where he showed the world that he can do what is expected from a leader who can get things done.

But while the praises filter in for Najib, it's probably time for Najib to show the same problem-solving methods at his own home, Malaysia as well. When the MH17 dust is settled, there is still a nation of two extremes that he needs to contend with.

And once again, the people will hope, that he does something to get things done without ceding to any extremes. Because, this time, Najib has proved he has what it takes to make things happen.

The question is: will he show what he can do for Malaysians, when the world is not watching?

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