

**Najib: If we love Umno, the party will survive for 70 more years**  
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Following is the transcript of the interview with Prime Minister and Umno president Najib Abdul Razak in conjunction with the 70th anniversary of Umno on May 11.

The interview was conducted at the Prime Minister's Office by Prof Dr Azizul Halim Yahya, Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara.

In the interview, Najib shared his views on Umno's struggle and survival, the current challenges he faces, and the empowerment of the bumiputera economy.

**Question: Datuk Seri, would you mind sharing the experience and memories you had with your late father Tun Abdul Razak, and identify the qualities that he instilled in you?**

**Najib:** I have so many memories of being with my father. I saw him as a leader who placed great emphasis on his service for the country and the people. He spent most of his time thinking about the people and the country. Not much time was left for any other activities. Even during his day off or when on vacation, he would remain dedicated and committed to his duties like a man with a mission so close to his heart.

That is why, when asked what I learned from him, I can say that we must place great emphasis on and take seriously our commitment to serving the people, the country and the party.

Secondly, to always think how the people and the country benefit from our decisions. So, those are the qualities that I have inherited directly and indirectly from my father.

**Was there any word of advice given by your late father? A specific advice that you vividly remember and use until today to help you govern our country?**

**Najib:** His advice to me when I was in school was to study hard and diligently to get good results, to be the best in class, if possible. That advice also taught me that if we want to do

something, we must go all out in doing it so that we will get the best results. It is the determination in doing what we do.

Secondly, I have witnessed my father's concern and deep commitment to taking care of the people's wellbeing. No matter how busy he was, if villagers came to see him, they will get his attention.

That means, their wellbeing had always been close to my father's heart.

**In regard to Umno's 70th anniversary on May 11, Umno began with a pledge to unite the Malays and to eventually obtain independence. Do you see the value of Umno's struggle and the sacrifices made by its members during the early years of its establishment as still the same today?**

**Najib:** I don't see any difference... if Umno was established as a party for the Malays from all groups and had broken the walls between those groups and associations and states, it shows that we do not just focus on state affairs, but also on country and national affairs... that is the principle we must hold on to and observe until today.

So, Malay unity and solidarity are the thrusts... the pillars of our strengths. As long as we stay united, the Malays will always have the extra power.

**Unlike the many political parties in the world which had failed to retain power, Umno has been able to do so since the country gained Independence in 1957. What actually the recipes that Umno had used to retain power and what should be done by the party to stay relevant?**

**Najib:** Alhamdulillah (All praise be to Allah), Umnop is probably the only political party that has remained in power continuously. Possibly because of its moderate policies. Besides, we give priority to the people's welfare and wellbeing... and we have proved our capabilities to bring development and changes, or making national transformation as we call it.

And each time we face a crisis, internal or external, Umno has proved its credibility to overcome it and put the party and the country back on track, and come out even stronger than before.

**Some quarters have been criticising Umno as they felt that Umno is no longer open, and some even criticised Umno leadership for allegedly refusing to take advice. In fact, even some former Umno leaders had been criticising the current leadership to the extent of calling for foreign intervention. How do you deal with such pressures?**

**Najib:** Firstly, it is a fact that today's Umno is more open and democratic than before. When I took over the helm of Umno leadership, one of the many initial steps that I took was to amend the party constitution, to be more open, inclusive and democratic.

This is evidence in the election of party president and other top posts in the party. Prior to this, the party president was elected based on the quota system and whoever wishes to run for Umno presidency would have to be nominated by 63 divisions.

Imagine the situation under the original constitution. Surely no one will be able to challenge the Umno president. So, if I want to stay in power forever or as long as I like, I would have used the old constitution... because under the old constitution, no one could possibly challenge the president.

But instead, I amended the constitution to enable the party president to be elected by 160,000 delegates at the grassroots level, not by merely 2,600 selected delegates who came to PWTC in Kuala Lumpur to cast their votes.

This shows that my aspiration as a leader is to change the philosophy and methods of election in Umno so that Umno will be seen as more open, more democratic. That is what I have been practising and I am the first Umno president elected according to the most open and most democratic system in the history of Umno. So, if anyone says that I'm undemocratic, the fact and the truth will say the opposite.

Secondly, I always emphasised that we must protect the interests of the party. Not that we do not allow criticism, but in the party, we must have channels and disciplines. If the party

(members) not well disciplined, and have no respect for the practices that do not affect the interests of the party, then the party will face a situation that can jeopardise its stability.

So that's why I say that if anyone has a different opinion, bring it up in a meeting, through the right channel, we can discuss it and reach a decision based on the spirit of consensus, consensus within the party. That's the way we make decision in the party. Not just a one man's call. Even if he is a former party leader, he cannot make a policy or decision for the party. The party must make a decision based on its constitution.

**Racial politics has become a hot topic of discussion in social and printed media. Some opined that Malaysia should not practise racial politics. Does Umno agree with the opinion?**

**Najib:** We are the party that adopts moderate policies and cares about all races even though our party is made up of only Malays and bumiputera. But it is our principles to be fair based on the principles and spirit of the federal constitution. We also respect the policies of BN, in which

Umno is the pillar. So, we do not stray away from the practices and policies brought by Umno leaders ever since its establishment.

**Datuk Seri, you have given great emphasis on the empowerment of bumiputera economy. Are you satisfied with the achievement of the policy so far?**

**Najib:** I think many have been achieved. Without Umno's struggles, it will not be possible for us to see the Malays achieving a better and comfortable position in economy. The poverty eradication agenda, for example, is almost completed. Our policy to create a medium class which comprises professionals is a result of Umno's struggles. The establishment of institutions, such as UiTM, Mara, Tekun and many others, are among the results of Umno's aspiration to empower the bumiputera economy.

I am personally committed to this. Each month I will chair the Bumiputera Economic Council meeting and yesterday (April 21), we have had a meeting and announced various new initiatives, including the carve-out policy. If there is a major project, we have decided

that at least 40 to 45 percent of the contract value, vendors and business opportunities will be given to bumiputera companies.

We have always strived to do that because, for me, the survival of political power must be backed by economic power.

**For how long do you plan to help the bumiputera?**

**Najib:** We do not have a finish line. But in terms of the spirit, it will be until we have reached a point where the country's wealth is divided in a fair and just manner.

Perhaps at that time, the Malays will be very confident, and no longer need any special policies to help them. Maybe at that time, the policies we practise can be dissolved or reviewed to be more open.

But what is most important is that we must reach the level of national wealth... because the Malays and the bumiputeras, they number more than 60 percent. But they only claim 30 percent (national wealth). Not 60 percent but only 30 percent. Which means that the Malays are very considerate and fair in whatever they are fighting for.

**Datuk Seri, Malaysia is not spared from the global economic recession and the fall in the price of commodities, like oil, had also affected our economy. In fact, the country's image has also been attacked by the foreign media. Can Malaysia overcome these challenges?**

**Najib:** Yes, we can make changes to our policies and to our budget. Which is why in January, I tabled the Budget Recalibration 2016 when the price of oil fell drastically from US\$110 a barrel to merely over US\$30.

We had to do something about it and we did it immediately and this has made the market and rating agencies more confident of our capabilities in tackling economic challenges arising from external factors... which are beyond our ability to control.

What we can do is to make some modification, adaptation or adjustment to the domestic policies which take into account the external factors which have changed drastically.

**Datuk Seri, you are the seventh Umno president and you have faced various challenges within Umno since becoming president. Now, the attacks are even more challenging. How do you find the strength to continue up till today?**

**Najib:** I look first at the support I have among the party members, including from the leaders at division level, which is still strong and they are still confident about my leadership. As long as I have the support of the party and the members of Parliament, I can go on leading our country.

About the attacks, they are due to the booming social media. We don't have social media before, but now that there is, everything becomes quickly viral. This is a new challenge in the changing environment.

I am the party president who has to face this environment. It was not like this before. I don't know, but if it was, perhaps the pressures faced by previous Umno presidents would be worse.

But I am strong because I am confident that what is being done is really with good intentions and for the good of the party, people and nation.

**The people see you appear calm in the face of all the challenges. Where does that calmness come from?**

**Najib:** (Laughs) As a leader, I cannot be rattled. As leaders, we must realise that we will be tested, every human being will be tested. Allah will test us in many ways, Allah has determined that no leader or individual will be free of tests.

In fact, there were also many tests during Tun Abdul Razak's era... the test of May 13. During the time of Mahathir, there were even more tests, with Umno being banned, the terrible financial crisis, so many people made bankrupt, and the (Datuk Seri) Anwar Ibrahim problems.

During my time so far, the issues are really not big. But because of social media and some parties using foreign newspapers, the pressures were a little intensified. The issue is not like the Asian crisis or when Umno being banned because our fundamentals are still strong.

The economic fundamentals are still strong. The political fundamentals are still strong. It is only a question of perception; the westerners would say the noise level is slightly loud due to the roles played by the social media and foreign newspapers.

**How do you see the social media today? Are there any specific measures which could be taken to tackle the issue of social media or do we let it be?**

**Najib:** We have accepted that Malaysia is an open country. This means that we have to accept any technological development. We will use it and bring it to Malaysia because we want Malaysia to become a nation which is considered modern and progressive.

So, whatever social media technology resulting from internet developments, we have accepted in Malaysia, and we are a nation where information is always available. So we can't change that. We cannot go backwards.

We can only move forward and we must first train our own Umno people at all levels to be the movers and active practitioners of the social media. Although we are only in Facebook and Twitter, at least we can post our comments there.

This is what I said is the new politics in the political environment. Umno now must change from our strengths/skills in the old politics to the new politics and the new environment. That's it.

This means that if we want to succeed as a party with continued influence and we want to remain relevant in future, then Umno must change according to the era of the social media and must have the ability to adapt to the new environment.

**In view of the 70th anniversary of Umno, what is the message that you want to convey to all Umno members?**

**Najib:** We must look back to the history when Umno was set up. The reasons it was formed. We must learn from its initial struggles because the principles, the objectives and the values are important.

So, although the circumstances have changed, the technology has changed, the challenges have changed, but we must hold strong to the principles and objectives of the struggle. Those are our strengths. Based on Islam and the Malay culture, customs, constitution and ethos. That must continue to be upheld today.

InsyaAllah (God willing), if we hold on to these principles and values, learn from our history, if we love the party, if we place the party (interests) above everything else, our party will celebrate its anniversary for 70 more years or maybe even more than that.

- *Bernama*

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