

'Razak a hero' - PM should emulate his father
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The reasons given by an Australian academic in a recent zealous acclaim that the late Abdul Razak was his 'hero' should be carefully studied and used as a model by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

As a professional consultant in policymaking and with hands-on experiences in rural and national development for many years in Malaysia and countries in the immediate region, the academic's reasons are important because they are still most relevant.

Indeed, with respect, especially when seen along with and based on my own exposure at different levels in comparative settings over 50 years, I can say with some measure of authority that Najib would do well to revert to Razak's reliance on the basic framework of social institutions based on peoples' participatory democracy and involvement in policy decision-making from the bottom-to-top strata of the social system.

The most effective outcome was that this approach acted as a 'check and balance' against the powers of the political leaders of the ruling class, as well as middle-level and senior bureaucratic officials who seemed quick to usurp the role played by the local leaders at grassroots level, especially when Razak announced that 'money was no problem for development'.

This skewed outcome was further aggravated by the fact that many of these politicians and bureaucrats themselves had limited experience and exposure especially in rural problems as envisaged by the fact that they never served in rural postings.

(Without stretching the point, it needs to be mentioned in a slightly different setting that even today, senior officials in ministries and departments associated with the planning and implementation of national and regional development plan have not worked in rural areas.

Indeed, the recent memoirs of a retired senior civil servant shows that it is possible to rise to the rank of secretary-general of an important ministry, and to be awarded a 'Tan Sri' to boot, without ever leaving KL!)

But Najib most needs to ensure that specific institutions are tasked with policymaking research initiatives with their 'ears on the ground' as Razak had done. His research division headed by Dr Agoes Salim, assisted by a small group of community development researchers, including myself, undertook path-breaking research and providing early feedback to Razak.

Indeed, where specialised additional training was needed, immediate arrangements were made for such facilities to be made available, irrespective of the racial affiliation of the personnel. For instance, Affifuddin Omar was sent for the PhD studies in agronomics and I to Madison Wisconsin for z Masters in sociology of development.

Najib needs to be clear on the selection and appointment of appropriate persons to fill the very important positions for national and rural development despite possible opposition from the ruling class.

When Razak appointed me to the 11-man National Committee for Gerakan Maju, as the only non-Malay and the most junior (the others being with the rank of secretary-general), the

civil service objected and Razak had to write a personal letter to my minister to secure my appointment.

Finally, when reporting to Razak on our research feedback that the opening ceremony for double cropping of 'padi' in the Muda area was likely to be poorly attended, I suggested that we approach the mosque officials in the area to make an appeal to the farmers to attend in large numbers.

Razak's directive to us was to 'draft the appeal' without the slightest concern that some of us preparing the draft would be non-Muslims.

The farmers response was a 90% turnout rate.

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