

'People First' mantra's hidden agenda
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has proved he has no time to spare for the tribal people of Sarawak when he failed to live up to his propaganda of 'People first, Performance now' by ignoring any meeting with the Penan community leaders during his visit there on July 22.

His trip to Ulu Baram, in Sarawak, was meant to see first-hand the problems faced by Penans and other tribes living in the area. Sadly, Najib decided it was more worthwhile to engage in a vote-winning exercise when he pledged projects worth millions of ringgit, all to ensure his victory in the coming general election.

The actual purpose of Najib's visit was to understand the problems faced by the Penans, including the rape incidences that have gone unresolved by the Sarawak government and the police.

Unfortunately, Najib decided a 'change in plan' would make him popular enough to win more votes, so he decided to use money to bait the simple people there. First, he pledged over RM100 million to upgrade the Beluru-Lapok road to link it to the city of Miri.

None if that was not enough, he pledged another RM6 million to implement a mini hydro-electric power project in Long Banga. Najib said another RM1 million would be allocated for the construction of a road linking Kampung Long Banga to a small airfield there.

The prime minister said a further RM500,000 would be allocated to implement the mobile clinic project in Kampung Long Jekitan, another settlement near Long Banga. He said the government had also raised the financial aid under the Rubber Replanting Scheme in Sarawak from RM10,000 to RM14,000.

Najib's rationale for splurging taxpayers money during his visit was to make sure people living there would benefit from the country's progress.

Najib's understanding that making 'expensive' promises would definitely put him in a position to stay in power for the many years to come will backfire because of his hidden agenda in making those pledges.

Is Najib not capable of thinking that he should have instead pledged money to ensure basic infrastructure issues like transportation for the Penans is solved so that their women and daughters do not have to hitch rides from the loggers who regrettably took advantage of the situation?

The Penan population is about 10,000 and between 300 and 500 of them lead nomadic lives.

Did Najib not find it important to pledge money to ease the lives of the Penan people in so many ways necessary? Why did he not ask the Sarawak state government for a detailed clarification on what help is required by the Penans in view of the rising number of rape cases reported by their women and girls? Or is it a case of Najib and the Sarawak state government turning a blind eye to the problems faced by the Penans in particular and other tribes there in general?

Don't judge tribal people

Najib, whose mantra of 'People First' is being propagated for the sake of winning votes, made it obvious that the issues faced by the Penans including the unresolved rape issues affecting their women and girls are not important enough to be looked into.

Sad indeed that community leaders who had turned up during Najib's visit did not even get a chance to come close to their own prime minister, let alone have the opportunity to engage in a meeting with him. Whatever happened to Najib's Twitter of 'people first'?

While the pledge is helpful, Najib should have used his discretion to announce if after having looked into

the problems of the Penans and other tribes, reassuring them that their grievances would be looked into. But no, that was not his agenda nor interest, was it?

Since Najib, the mastermind behind 'People First' failed to live up to his own words, how does he expect the public to have faith in them? And why should the public believe what he says when politicians in this country behave and expect prima donna services?

NONEThe Penans and other tribes of Ulu Baram have their share of problems which need urgent attention and help. But neither is Najib, nor the Sarawak chief minister interested in looking into their problems. Likewise, the police, too, are reluctant to look into complaints of rape of the Penan women and schoolgirls.

Are the Penans being judged for who and what they are? Is the poverty and illiteracy surrounding the Penans and other tribes there used as a yardstick to refuse all help to them? Why is Najib not perturbed by the countless rape complaints raised by the Penan women and girls against the timber loggers there?

When will the federal government acknowledge the existence of the Penans as indigenous people and respect their corresponding rights?

Najib aside, his wife Rosmah Mansor, too, is least interested in helping the Penan women out. This despite the fact that several women's groups had approached Rosmah to intervene and help the rape survivors attain justice. However, Rosmah has reserved her time for Permata, pouring millions to develop a 'genius brood'.

Now that Najib himself has failed to live up to his very own 'People First' motto, it says a lot of the politics behind this catch phrase. There is no doubt left that the 'People First' is a gimmick to seduce voters into committing their votes to Barisan Nasional come the next general election, hoodwinking people into believing that for once the government is all out to look after their needs.

Lip service with an agenda

Despite the many calls for the rapes of the Penan women and girls to be addressed immediately, the federal government and the Sarawak state government could not care less in showing concern and helping the survivors and preventing more rapes from taking place. Why? Whose interest is at stake here?

The Penan women and schoolgirls have cried rape close to a decade now and it is a shame that the previous government and the current 'powers-that-be' find it a waste of time to help these women and girls. It is annoying that the authorities lack the decency to respect the severity of the rape issue and have taken the easy way out, labeling the rape survivors as 'promiscuous women'.

Until and unless the current prime minister who blares the horn of 'People First' 24/7 steps in and helps the Penan women seek justice and ensure their safety from the hands of loggers in the jungles of Sarawak, the tagline of 'People First' is meaningless in the real sense of the word.

NONEWhen Najib shows sincere interest in helping address the issue of sexual violence against women, only then will his 'People First' tag have buyers. He must work hard at ensuring the rakyat has faith in his 'People First' by first showing concern, sincere concern that is, in listening to the grievances of the Penan people and helping the rape survivors live in a safe environment. Rape is a crime that defiles a woman's honour, leaving her a lifelong psychological trauma to deal with.

The federal and state governments' refusal to help the Penan women and girls live and travel in a safe environment is clear proof that all the talk about 'People First' and '1Malaysia' is nothing but rhetoric, lip service with an agenda. '1Malaysia' would mean that Malaysia is home to one and all and home is a place where its occupants feel safe with no harm in sight.

But this is not the case for the Penan people who while asking little by regarding the jungle as their home, have not been guaranteed the safety of moving about safely, without fearing for their lives and encroachment of their dignity and space.

Did Najib give his '1Malaysia' baby great thought before taking it to the people? What meaning does '1Malaysia' hold for Najib? For the Penans, both '1Malaysia' and the 'People First' mean nothing to them because they are continually oppressed, be it concerning the safety of their women and girls or the issue of native customary rights.

Najib's much anticipated visit to Ulu Baram was a letdown to the Penan and other tribes there, not to mention the human rights defenders who were put off with the way the trip to Ulu Baram was manipulated by Najib for political gain.

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