

Nazri's pitch to 'pluralistic Malaysians'
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Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz has lifted anchor and floats intriguingly beyond the reflexive partisanship of Umno-BN politics.

There was a time when he was content to be the 'attack dog' of the Umno president, guarding his flanks and sallying forth against those who the No 1 could not take on publicly for prudential reasons.

This spell also included stints as loose cannon, taking on icons like Dr Mahathir Mohamed; a no-holds-barred exchange on who is more racist of the two sometime towards the end of last year standing out memorably.

nazri abdul azizBut Nazri (right) has since gone on to offer more shavings to his political persona.

Alone among ministers in the Najib cabinet, he is willing to go beyond the safety of pious platitudes and syrupy generalities when speaking about the prime minister's '1Malaysia' concept.

The concept - since its launch at the outset of the Najib administration in April last year - has languished under a cloud of unknowing.

This is because its would-be champions have been tentative in exposition. While with one hand they encourage one hope after another, with the other they shed a delicate mist of uncertainty over the concept.

The Freudian racist slips of a Nasir Safar and the revanchist rants of an Ibrahim Ali have not helped either. Prime Minister Najib bears some blame for the cloud of unknowing under which his '1Malaysia' concept has slipped.

The needed tonic

Last March, he unveiled his New Economic Model that promised to give bite to '1Malaysia'. But by June when he launched the 10th Malaysia Plan, he backpedaled under pressure from Malay revanchist group Perkasa.

The upshot: NEM, which tended to de-prioritise affirmative action quotas, was elided rather than subsumed by the 10MP - a victory of sorts for Perkasa and a retreat for '1Malaysia'. Politics is not for faint-hearts and political ideas are not cherries to be plucked from some mental orchard and relegated or discarded when conditions are not propitious.

If the historian Arnold Toynbee is right about challenge-and-response being the motor of history, then '1Malaysia' can be seen as a resourceful politician's response to the country's decades-long race-induced inertia and pessimism that things could change.

NONEBut thus far, as an idea, it has been a good breakfast but a lean supper.

Yesterday Nazri Aziz, by calling for genuine partnerships between bumiputera and non-bumiputera, a call that in its essence is cavalier about race-confined percentages, made a pitch to the what may be called the 'pluralistic Malaysian'.

The pluralistic Malaysian is one who is unwilling to be confined by race, religion and language, learns from others and is prepared to impart to them, is watchful of errors in one's own perceptions and modest when correcting those in others, and has a certain hesitance to judge others too quickly.

These are the people who can engage with each other across the gamut of the country's sectarian divides. Nazri's call to them to be brave, breakthrough and create the hitherto unknown is the tonic a flagging concept needs.

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