

**Racism: 'I can't change people overnight'**  
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Premier Najib Razak says that he cannot make all racist government officers disappear overnight despite espousing his 1Malaysia as an inclusive concept.

Najib (*right*) was responding to MCA's barrage of fire against racism recently.

"I know you complain that some officer made racist remarks. It happens...Yes, (this is) 1Malaysia, but it cannot be made perfect in one stroke. It is a journey, we are working on making things better."

"It is difficult to change people. I cannot change people just like that. Don't be emotional; we must be realistic," said the premier in his speech while opening the 57th MCA annual general meeting at the party's headquarters in Kuala Lumpur today.

The Pekan parliamentarian argued that he is powerless to change such individuals overnight, relating how even former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad once remarked that his greatest failure as a PM was that he failed to change the attitude of Malaysians.

"He was PM for 22 years; I am only a prime minister for one and a half years," said Najib.

The PM however assured that the government will take action on errant government officers who make racial slights, adding that the government does not condone such acts.

In the same breath, he dodged explanation of the government's inaction on recent cases of racist remarks from civil servants with the excuse of following proper procedures.

"There must be due process, a proper investigation," he said.

'Harmless banter'

The prime minister also pleaded for understanding from the 1,764 MCA delegates who were present, saying that certain remarks deemed racist by some were actually just harmless banter amongst certain people.



"Sometimes you have to put it in the right cultural context. I am not condoning it but it happens," he said.

He offered as example the 'colourful' way Northerners described their friends.

"I have a friend Zainon. He was the assemblyperson for Baling. He was a rather dark gentleman. Because of that amongst us



friends we call him Non Toyu. 'Non' as a short form for his name and 'Toyu' is what northerners call kicap or soy sauce because of his dark skin."

"If you put it in the context of Malaysia it sounds wrong. I would not call my MIC friends 'Toyu', but I have been calling my friend that for years, and we are okay with it," said Najib.

The Umno president also downplayed the hullabaloo recently created by incidents of racist civil servants saying that it was not too much of an aberration.

"These things happens; it happened several times before, even last time," he admitted.

Najib blamed the internet for blowing the incidents out of proportion and making them seem bigger than they are.

"(Such incidents have) been magnified by the proliferation of information technology," he said.

'You help me, I help you'

In his speech Najib also tried to placate MCA delegates, some of whom had expressed their frustrations with Umno's domination of BN and government policy-making.



They argued this hamstrung the Chinese party from delivering its promises to their grassroots, and had the PM assuring them that the ruling party still needed MCA.

"In order for BN to function, we still need a strong and effective MCA," Najib said.

The PM assured that the BN will give latitude for the Chinese party to speak out and be the voice of the people

"The days of fighting for the rights of the people in cabinet and behind closed doors are over. The people, especially the young need to see that the MCA is really speaking out for them," said Najib.

However, he reminded the MCA that they too must be responsive and work harder to ensure Chinese support for him and the BN, as they will have to fight for the same allocations that will have to be split amongst the Malays from Umno and Indians from MIC, who are also demanding their lion's share as well.

"You look after me, I look after you. You demand, but it is difficult if I ask for support and you cannot provide it," said the BN chairperson.

Najib concluded by asking the MCA to clean house and work towards strengthening its party structure if it wants to really contribute to a stronger BN.

"You have a new leadership, but this is just the beginning. It is still a work in progress. Leaders on the grounds must also be given a kick. Chua must do a little bit of ass-kicking to get the team to move," he said.

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