

**Najib speaks with forked tongue**  
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**Kee Thuan Chye**

Najib Razak contradicted himself in his speech last Thursday at the Umno General Assembly. He spoke of the all-embracing 1Malaysia concept on one hand and of the need to retain the New Economic Policy (NEP) on the other. The Native Americans in old cowboy movies might have said that he spoke with a forked tongue.

How can you have the NEP and at the same time say that we are all 1Malaysia? The NEP is exclusive to a particular group of people, and such exclusivity sets them apart. There is no 1Malaysia; there are 2Malaysias.

Does Najib not see that or is his 1Malaysia idea merely PR spin or marketing hype?

This central contradiction is what makes many non-Malays sceptical of what he is touting. The only non-Malays who will buy it are those who are not discerning enough or who are easily bought.

I'm almost tempted to include the Bagan Pinang voters in this category but their decision to support so strongly a politician with a corruption record in that recent by-election could be due to other concerns.

Why continue to have an affirmative action programme that is still based on race? Haven't we moved on since March 8, 2008? How much different is Najib's defense of the need for the NEP from that of his cousin Hishammuddin Hussein's pre-March 8 keris-wielding pledge to defend it against adversaries? It's merely less militant, that's all.

Najib slammed the Malays who say they no longer need "crutches" and called them arrogant. He asked, "What about the Malays who still require help? Is it fair if the group who still need crutches are denied help?"

Why hasn't he thought of providing help to people of all races who need "crutches"? Wouldn't that be more in line with 1Malaysia? All he needs to do is look at the Malaysian Economic Agenda proposed by Pakatan Rakyat. Go back to basics – have an affirmative action programme based on need. Isn't that the original intent of the NEP?

It looks like Najib was invoking the NEP at the assembly expressly to play to the Malay gallery, to ensure that his regular customers will remain faithful. Meanwhile, the non-Malay customers can wait. He will find some other occasion in the future to throw them small gifts and lure them to buy his merchandise.

That's the kind of ploy we've been used to through the decades, but hasn't it exceeded its sell-by date? Shouldn't we reject it instead of fall for its trickery? Leaders of race-based parties like Najib must resolve their central dilemma – pander to their own race or be truly multi-racial. They can't have it both ways.

This time around, Najib has chosen to stick with tradition. We must hold leaders accountable for their doublespeak. Similarly, we have to insist that Ong Tee Keat stick to his promise of resigning as MCA president now that a no-confidence vote has been taken against him.

**If Umno is not racist...**

At the Umno assembly, Najib also said that the Malays are not racist. He is absolutely right; they are not. But what about Umno? He said it is not racist too.

If Umno is not racist, why did it organise forums after March 8 in which Malays were warned that Malay power was being eroded and that Malay land had fallen into non-Malay hands?

If Umno is not racist, why does it maintain an indoctrination agency like the Biro Tata Negara (BTN) which inculcates in young Malay minds the idea of Ketuanan Melayu and wariness of the other races? (For more on the BTN, read Dr Azly Rahman's chapter 'On the Problem of Ketuanan Melayu and the Work of the Biro Tata Negara' in the book *Multiethnic Malaysia*.)

If Umno is not racist, why does it allow the newspapers it owns, particularly in the Malay language, to run stories and commentaries that could easily be deemed seditious? Don't tell me that it's because Umno believes in the independence of the media and therefore does not intervene. I've been in journalism for more than 30 years and I know that's a lie.

Najib also pointed out that the true meaning of racism lay in the apartheid policy that once held sway in South Africa. Well, he was not quite the pot calling the kettle black because it is true that Malaysia does not practise apartheid like the National Party of South Africa did. But why do non-Malay parents have to work so much harder to send their children for tertiary education? Why do they have to outsource such education overseas?

Why is there a restrictive quota for the intake of non-Malay students into our public universities? Why are there educational institutions that are strictly for Malays? And why was there so much hue and cry against Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim's suggestion for Universiti Teknologi Mara to offer 10 percent of its places to non-Malay students?

Why is only a small percentage of government scholarships granted to non-Malays? Why do some non-Malay students who top their classes not get such scholarships? Do the non-Malays not pay taxes?

Why is the Malaysian Civil Service so understaffed by non-Malays? And of which race are the overwhelming numbers of high officials in the civil service, universities, police force, army and so on?

Is it not just a subtler form of apartheid that Malaysia practices? And is it not a fact that ours is one of only a few countries in the world that institutionalises racial discrimination? So, what is Najib talking about? Whom is he trying to fool? What nonsense is this 1Malaysia?

*KEE THUAN CHYE is the man behind the book 'March 8: The Day Malaysia Woke Up', which is also available in Chinese translation.*

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