

Ku Li: NEM an acid test for Najib
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Aidila Razak

The New Economic Model (NEM) is a crucial test for Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to prove that he is serious about reforms, said seasoned parliamentarian Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

NONETHis is especially true in the current climate of growing unemployment and capital flight, said Razaleigh (right), a former finance minister.

He said this to reporters after the launch of the second edition of No Cowardly Past: James Puthuchear, Writings, Poems and Commentaries at the Petaling Jaya Civic Centre yesterday.

Asked if he is confident of Najib's ability as a reformist, the Gua Musang MP said he is willing to give the prime minister the benefit of the doubt.

"He has been (in office) for almost a year, and we have not seen the fruits of his labour yet (because such reforms) need some time...these things just cannot happen overnight," he explained.

However, he said Najib can use the NEM to restore confidence in the state of the economy.

Similarly, in his speech, No Cowardly Past editor KS Jomo - an economist by training - said the current economic crisis and Malaysia's trend of lacklustre growth is an opportunity for change.

"We see a very interesting moment where many comfortable assumptions about public policy are starting to be questioned...it implies that 'business as usual' is not acceptable," he said.

He noted that Najib now has the opportunity to reshape the system in order to change the trend of lacklustre growth experienced in the past decade.

NONETHis is also a chance to review the basis of affirmative action policies, said Jomo (left) who is assistant secretary-general for economic development in the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

"In earlier times, affirmative action was on the basis of need...now it's on the basis of supremacy, which is closer to Nazism...rather than what people like (former South African president Nelson) Mandela) fought for," he said.

The question now is not whether or not to repeal all affirmative action, but to choose the type of affirmative action which will minimise abuse, he said.

'I've always been consistent'

This was supported by Razaleigh, who reminded his audience that the New Economic Policy (NEP), blamed for the often abused affirmative action, had been replaced by the New Development Policy in 1991.

"NONEThe NEP was brought back in the afterlife as a slogan by the leadership of Umno Youth in 2004. It was and remains the most low-cost way to portray oneself as a champion of the Malays," he said.

Answering questions from the floor, he refuted a claim that his reformist stance is inconsistent with his previous views, especially on Malay unity, during his Semangat 46 days.

He explained that the Umno splinter party was formed in the late 1980s so that those who were "unwanted by (then president Dr Mahathir Mohamad) could have a home" and would not resort to "radical measures by joining PAS".

"This was the basis of the formation, and not for the sake of having a strong Malay party...I have always been consistent," he said.

NONERazaleigh added that he had also closed ranks with Mahathir as advised by (first prime minister) Tunku Abdul Rahman in the interests of "peace and stability", which was the foremost concern at the time.

"Tunku was concerned that Mahathir might use his victory to take radical measures," he said.

To another question about the possibility of his joining Pakatan Rakyat, Razaleigh said: "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

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