

**Time's up for Utusan, Dr M and Perkasa?
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COMMENT A long overdue public grilling for the Umno-owned Utusan daily may just do the trick in helping to shore up public belief that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is serious about wanting to chart a new direction for his party and BN coalition.

Utusan has been a key factor along with former premier Mahathir Mohamad and ultra-Malay rights group Perkasa in fomenting the greatest racial and religious discord the country has seen in decades.

In 2008, its twisted reporting landed Seputeh MP Teresa Kok in jail on ISA detention. In 2009, its call to Bangkitlah Melayu or Arise Malays not only roused the community but also sowed the seeds for the current groundswell of anti-Umno sentiment amongst the other ethnic groups.

In 2010, it went head-to-head with PAS' *Harakahdaily* over the Allah issue, carried out countless attacks to vilify Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, created racial hatred for Serdang MP Teo Nie Ching and rapper Namewee. Now, its editors may be fighting for their jobs if they insist on continuing to churn out stories that pit the races against each.

For this is what it amounts to - media-generated racial warfare. Utusan cannot deny its slew of pro-Perkasa articles published in recent days is aimed at rallying Malay support, but against whom and for what? The obvious answer is against the non-Malays and for racial and political dominance.

There is also speculation that the *Utusan* articles are meant to turn Malay sentiment against Najib, to make him appear to be anti-Malay in comparison with Mahathir and Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

But even with narrower, factional interests involved, the ultimate damage will be on the country as a whole, and the psyche of the various ethnic groups risk being permanently scarred by this sort of blindsided race-bashing.

And this is why Nazri Aziz, the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, should not lose any more time going after Utusan.

He is widely regarded as Najib's muse. But even so, as with all manoeuvres, his words are only significant if there is follow-through action especially if Utusan chooses to defy Najib. What will Nazri and Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein do then?

If Nazri's barely-veiled threat to Utusan fizzles out, then the victory for Najib's foes within Umno will resound and the situation will turn very ominously for him and his allies. It would also fan out to benefit the Pakatan Rakyat and further drag down public confidence in Najib's leadership.

"It is actually Najib's own fault for moving so slowly and softy. He barely has time now to rally Malaysians back to his camp. He should not worry about his hold on Umno. No matter how powerful the warlords - they will come round to him once he shows he can unite the country and deliver victory," an Umno watcher told *Malaysia Chronicle*.

"Who else in Umno can do it? Muhyiddin? Mahathir? Not to be rude, but the DPM is not national material. Mahathir is past his prime and after showing his true colors and reminding the country how racist he is, the only way he can unite Malaysia now will be through the military or force."

Indeed, the view of many pundits seem to be that Najib should not look back but push ahead with his New Economic Model and 1Malaysia plan to unify the races. Only then, would he be able to show some semblance of achievement to help the BN salvage a victory at the next general election due latest by mid-2013.

Before that, the PM faces is a litmus test in the 10th Sarawak state election which sources told *Malaysia Chronicle* will be held after Chinese New Year in 2011.

"BN will retain Sarawak but it won't do well. Pakatan will make a lot of headway. The thing is Umno and BN should accept by now, it is not about two-thirds parliamentary majority or state assembly dominance anymore. If they can win, it is already good enough – don't talk about margin. And if Umno members want to blame anyone, they should blame Mahathir, *Utusan* and Perkasa," the pundit said.

On Wednesday, Nazri minced no words during an interview with *The Malaysian insider*, questioning if *Utusan* knew who its bosses were. Very significantly, he also asked if the newspaper was trying to pit Najib against Mahathir and for what motive.

"I cannot understand *Utusan*. Who is their boss — Najib or Dr Mahathir? I wonder sometimes if they have an agenda to bring back Dr Mahathir to replace Najib. They should be promoting Najib's 1 Malaysia and not undermine his programme," Nazri said.

" [Instead] they are supporting Dr Mahathir. Because in the angle of their news reports, they want to give Dr Mahathir more coverage than Najib. They seem to have their own agenda. Do they have an agenda to bring back Dr Mahathir to replace Najib?" - *Malaysia Chronicle*

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