

Najib: Let's focus on the 'real' issues

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THE Umno general assembly next week will act as a mirror into the soul of the Malays, where issues close to the race and their concerns are raised.

Party deputy president Datuk Seri Najib Razak is hoping that the debate will not be too extreme or unreasonable.

"We will raise issues, but we must understand that our audience is not confined to the 2,000 or more in Dewan Merdeka. It is also for the Malays and non-Malays outside," he said in an exclusive interview with *Berid Harian* at his residence in Putrajaya:

"This is because they know that Umno is the main thrust of Barisan Nasional, so Umno attracts more attention and interest than other parties.

"We therefore don't want debates that are too extreme or unreasonable until they are offensive to others."

Najib said that since Umno represented 3.2 million members and was the hope of 16 million Malays in the country the assembly must fulfil the aspirations of Malays waiting for a response to a number of important issues.

The Deputy Prime Minister said efforts to develop and uplift the Malays had been going on for many years.

He noted that the New Economic Policy was, by and large, accepted by the non-Malays.

The evidence of this lay in the fact that Barisan Nasional had scored strong wins at the polls since 1974.

"In the 1978 and 1982 elections, and subsequently during the height of the NEP, we achieved huge wins. This means that the NEP has air ready been accepted by the non-Malays.

"If we package it in a way that is not intimidating or worrying to the Chinese community, they can accept it.

"It can be said that most Chi-

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nese Malaysians want to see the Malays enjoy an even level of prosperity. Only, they want it to be fair to them without restricting them or denying them their rights."

Studies showed that between 1970 and 1983, the Bumiputera equity rose from 2.5 per cent in 1970 to 18 per cent in 1983.

During this same period, Chinese equity went up to 47 per cent, proving that the NEP did not prejudice other communities, he said.

On the possibility of two

camps emerging at the assembly—one in support of the administration led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and the other in favour of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad—he said?

"I see full support for Pak Lah at the assembly. Delegates will affirm their complete sup-

port for Pak Lah. I doubt there will be a problem.

"We don't want this year's assembly to revolve around the conflict between Pak Lah and Dr Mahathir. What we want is a gathering that reflects our struggle to defend the Malays and the country.

"That is why we need to

strengthen Umno. When we support the party president, it means we support Umno under his leadership to continue its efforts and struggles.

"If Pak Lah's stewardship is weak because he does not have our support, our progress in fighting for the national mission will be cut short."