

DATE: 22/10/2010



61st UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

# The Malay realist in Najib surfaces

AS earlier indicated, Datuk Seri Najib Razak did show the way — his way — in minding Umno, the party he inherited about 18 months ago. In a speech reflecting his view as a realist, the Umno president spoke firmly and clearly.

It was a speech laced with deep-meaning Malay proverbs, removing many doubts as to his commitment to the Malay cause and that of other communities enshrined in the Federal Constitution.

Ever since assuming power, some Malays had asked whether the Malay agenda was still with him and with Umno. At some point, the 1 Malaysia philosophy that he introduced had sparked debates and concerns among many Malays.

Najib's speech yesterday would give his Umno brothers and sisters a sense of rejuvenation, perhaps. Many would say that it was a brave speech, especially amid today's political landscape where expressions of support of one's ethnic interest would immediately be labelled as "racist".

While the speech would be seen as a clear pointer to Najib's views as a true Umno leader, the cynics among his critics would not be easily convinced. They would want to see and feel specific touch points from the Malay perspective.

There are enough arguments from the speech to show Najib's belief in Umno's struggle. It would be difficult for anyone to counter his articulation since he drew a fair bit from the nation's history and the Federal Constitution.

In this regard, the Umno number one boss drew everyone's attention to the social contract that has been agreed by the country's forefathers and enshrined in the Federal Constitution, which forms the basis for the highest law in the land.

"Whether we like it or not, we are compelled to respect and honour that noble understanding as this is certainly the key to the country's con-



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Debates on this in recent years had threatened to get out of hand. But the prime minister did mention a new foundation for racial relationship. This must take into account two important principles: a shared future founded on history and today's realities.

This is easier said than done, as we all know. As if asked how this could be done, the prime minister fell back on the Federal Constitution.

"The position of Malays and Bumiputeras and the interests of other communities are embedded in the Constitution. Thus, any such polemics on these are now academic," Najib told the assembly.

The speech was carried live on national television, with the full text also available in today's newspapers.

Seen from any perspective, it was a compelling speech. Yes, there was fiery rhetoric. Then again, this was very much a political speech at a political assembly and dedicated basically to his political colleagues.

While this may indeed be so, it was also not lost on the audience that Najib meant every word he had uttered. To deviate from such declarations could be risky for Najib politically.

To many in Dewan Merdeka, where the Umno assembly had been held for more than 25 years, it was a speech they had come to hear.

The rhetoric did enough to convince Umno members that Najib had indeed reaffirmed Umno's role as the champion and protector of the Malays. It must now be immediately followed with concrete measures and programmes.

But if his Umno brothers and sisters were to leave the hall thinking



Datuk Seri Najib Razak reaffirms Umno's role as the champion and protector of the Malays.

speech, they should read it again. Firmly and in measured tones, Najib said: "The Malays of the 21st century must be made to be ready for this era. From that of being too obsessed with rights, it is incumbent upon the Malays to prepare themselves to benefit from such rights.

"Of what good are quotas, reserves and permits if they are wasted? Of what good is opportunity if it is surrendered for short-term gain?"

"They must work on capacity building and face today's realities."

If there were any among the crowd who felt that success was their divine right, Najib said this was far from the truth.

professionalism and do so with honour and respect.

What were the other messages in his speech? At one point, the prime minister cautioned anyone against trying to undo what had been agreed upon by the country's early leaders.

Even though Umno's leadership principles were based on its strong moral obligations, he told everyone that there was a limit to repeated pressure on the country's social fabric, especially pertaining to communal relationships.

It was not lost on the crowd as to the repercussions of such acts, he said, adding that this could lead to an extremely dangerous situation in a