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Najib: Priority for human rights and civil liberties

PUTRAJAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said his administration would not use the Internal Security Act arbitrarily but would give importance to human rights and civil liberties.

He said the ISA was undergoing a review to ensure that it incorporated several provisions which upheld these principles.

"Several provisions (of the ISA) will reflect our intention to uphold civil liberties and establish a check and balance so that the ISA is not used arbitrarily or according to the whim of the authorities without regard for the fundamental rights of the people of Malaysia," he told a group of journalists from Indonesia at his office here.

The journalists, here to attend the Malaysian Press Awards of the Malaysian Press Institute in Kuala Lumpur on Monday night, were the first group of foreign journalists to interview Najib after his elevation as the prime minister on April 3.

Najib said his decision to release 13 ISA detainees recently was a government gesture which gave importance to the fundamental rights and civil liberties of a modern, mature and civilised society.

At the interview, Najib was asked about his style of administration, Malaysia-Indonesia bilateral relations, regional security, press freedom in Malaysia and the role of the two prime ministers before him.

Touching on the "1Malaysia. People First. Performance Now" concept which he announced soon after becoming prime minister, Najib said it was "the overarching philosophy" behind his administration.

He said that it emphasised what should be done from now to spur the nation towards realising the objectives and vision set by the two prime ministers before him, which was to enable the people to achieve "excellence, glory and distinction" and realise "Vision 2020" or developed-nation status.

"That is our destination, but before we attain Vision 2020, I want



Datuk Seri Najib Razak says the '1Malaysia' concept emphasises mutual respect and trust among all the ethnic groups.

to emphasise what we have to do now, what then is the process. Unity, people first and performance now."

The "1Malaysia" concept emphasised mutual respect and trust among all the ethnic groups in the country, which Najib described as the pillar of national solidarity.

Najib said the effort must be carried out with the full awareness of the government and the people in all the programmes implemented.

"This concept must be translated into action, for example, the allocations for Chinese and Tamil schools should be given directly to the school boards.

"No ethnic group should feel marginalised in terms of government policies and programmes."

He said the Bumiputeras should also be given assistance because they still lagged behind but it should be carried out fairly, both for the Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras.

On "People First", Najib said the government he led would ensure that it was sensitive and close to the people, that it was not an elite government seen as favouring

large corporations and practising cronyism or nepotism.

"It is for this reason that I went on a walkabout (last Saturday) in Malay, Chinese and Indian areas. I wanted to show that leaders must be close to the people. I do not feel awkward when meeting the people."

Najib also said that his style of administration would emphasise the "Performance Now" aspect so that the people could see that what was planned was actually implemented.

"I will emphasise that all action should be expedited because the people want to see it happen.

"Everything has to be done quickly, and they must be seen to happen by the people. I emphasise the outcome, not just the output. There is a fine distinction between output and outcome.

"This will be the style of my new administration. We will give priority to performance-based leadership."

Najib also said that he wanted to be the prime minister of all of the people and he would be fair, that he would not want to be seen as a prime minister who favoured

any ethnic group.

Touching on the question of freedom in a democratic system, Najib said Malaysia was liberal but practised freedom with responsibility or there would be anarchy.

Asked about press freedom, Najib, who was the guest of honour at the Malaysian Press Awards event, said he wanted the media to play the role of critic of the government in a responsible manner so that leaders would not be arrogant and abuse their power.

"If government leaders cannot be criticised at all, we will feel that we are invincible. The feeling of invincibility is something not good because we may abuse our power or we may be arrogant in terms of our position."

Najib said he hoped to be able to establish good cooperation with the media so that there was mutual understanding on their respective roles.

"The press must be responsible. It must not carry out unfounded personal attacks and make use of rumours as content as though it is the truth. A responsible press must be an important component of a healthy democratic practice."

On Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Najib said he was convinced the two former prime ministers would provide strong support to him as the new prime minister.

Saying that he had a good relationship with both of them, Najib said he hoped the two statesmen would be able to use their respective strengths to help consolidate Umno and the Barisan Nasional.

"I have a good and close relationship with both of them. I believe it is important for former prime ministers to support the current prime minister in carrying on the cause."

The journalists were from the *Jakarta Post*, *Kompas*, *Sinar Harapan*, *Republika*, *Media Indonesia*, Antara news agency, *Gatra* magazine and RCTI television station.—Bernama