

Newspaper	New Straits Times
Date	7 December 2015

Govt not afraid to make hard decisions, says Najib

NST - 7/12/2015

COURAGE: They are made for the long-term benefit of the people, says PM

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THE government has displayed great amounts of courage to ensure that the country remains on course towards becoming a developed nation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday.

Speaking at the launch of the third National Undergraduates Leadership Conference here last night, Najib made it clear that the govern-

ment was not afraid to make difficult decisions for the benefit of the people.

Najib, who is also Umno president and finance minister, said this included the government's decision to sign the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement.

"During our discussions with United States President Barack Obama, I said to him: 'Mr President, we want TPP but we want TPP on our terms'. We had to be brave but in the end, we got what we wanted.

"We got a deal that I feel is very good," he told about 225 student leaders at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Najib said there was no reason to be afraid of the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) and TPP, as these would help the nation compete with other advanced economies in Asia and Europe.

"If Vietnam was brave enough to enter TPP, then why should Malaysia be afraid? Where is our bravery? I am confident that we can compete with any country in the world and be successful."

On the controversy surrounding 1Malaysia Development Bhd (IMDB), Najib explained to the students that the opposition was waging a war of perception against the government.

"If they (the opposition) attack us using logic, rational thinking and facts, they will lose. It's now a battle of the minds. Even (IMDB president

and group executive director) Arul Kanda Kandasamy said it's now a war of perception.

"The reality is very different. It is now clear that there are solutions (to IMDB's problems). IMDB has a lot of assets and a Chinese company has bought one of them for RM17 billion. We should understand these facts and not get carried away by emotion."

Najib, during his 30-minute speech, congratulated the "pro-Aspirasi" student movement, which is seen as supportive of the government, for winning nationwide campus elections held earlier this year.

"If we explain (the issues) clearly, I am certain all youths will be with the government.

"That is why the 'pro-Aspirasi' movement won big in the recent campus elections.

"Who says no one is supporting the government?"

Najib said while the government was committed to listening to the voices of the youth, it could not be afraid to make "difficult decisions".

"We will build this nation to the best of our ability.

"But there are constraints despite the many things I plan to achieve. One thing you must understand is that there are trade-offs. For example, if we did not take away the oil subsidies, the country's revenues would have been reduced by RM23 billion.

"This would have meant fewer

university campuses and fewer scholarships. Sometimes, we need to make unpopular decisions but the fact is that the government does not want to make people's lives difficult. What we do is for long-term benefits."

Najib, however, gave an assurance to the students that the government would not sideline education.

"Education always receives the largest allocation in the annual budget. Human capital development is the government's topmost priority, and even though toll rates may increase, university tuition fees will not."

Present were the prime minister's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Shahidan Kassim and Umno Education Bureau chairman Tan Sri Dr Ibrahim Shah Abu Shah.

The leadership conference, also known as Pemanas 3.0, was held for the third consecutive year by the Umno Education Bureau.

The four-day conference, which was similar to a Parliament sitting, began on Thursday in conjunction with the upcoming Umno general assembly.

Six of the best debaters were also chosen to present their motions during the general assembly, to be held at the Putra World Trade Centre from Tuesday to Saturday.