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'Clear skies' to return soon

Najib reassures Chinese community that racially-charged episodes are temporary

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By FOONG PEK YEE
pekyee@thestar.com.my

THE Prime Minister wore the iconic navy blue Barisan Nasional uniform during last Sunday's MCA annual general assembly.

An MCA central delegate member said he has never seen Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak wear this shirt – which has Barisan's dacing imprinted all over – at MCA assemblies.

The blue on the shirt is not only easy on the eyes, but the attire is the most appropriate one at this point in time as calls for MCA to leave Barisan grows louder.

The Barisan chairman probably wanted to use the shirt to send the first signal as he arrived at the MCA headquarters – that Barisan Nasional and MCA are together:

Starting his speech with two Chinese words – *zhong yong* (moderation) and *Yi Ge Ma Lai Xi Ya* (1Malaysia) – Najib received a big round of applause from the floor.

The Barisan chairman is surely aware of the calls for MCA – the second largest Barisan component party – to leave the coalition in the wake of open racist threats and remarks from some Umno leaders and those seemingly linked to Umno.

Topping the list of racially charged episodes was the Sept 16 red-shirt rally which left feelings of fear which turned into anger among the Chinese.



Welcome party: (From right) MCA deputy president Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong and Liow welcoming Najib at the 62nd MCA AGM.

Protesters barged into Kuala Lumpur's Petaling Street or Chinatown and demanded that the traders share their earnings with the Malays, including 50% of the stalls there.

That was not all. Its organiser, Datuk Jamal Md Yunos who is Sungei Besar Umno

chairman, turned up the heat by threatening to hold weekly red-shirt protests in Petaling Street until their demands were met.

And media reports quoting Najib describing the red shirt rally as a peaceful assembly was most shocking.

However, there were talks sub-

sequently that the Prime Minister had been misled or that he had not been given the full picture on the ground.

The only consolation so far was that Jamal, who threatened another rally or a possibly riot in Petaling Street on Sept 26, was remanded by police on the eve of it and the rally was called off.

Who can fault the Chinese for getting angry with such racial threats? The slow economy and an increasingly weak consuming power had already left many traders struggling to keep afloat.

Their hope of doing more business on the run up to Mid-Autumn Festival on Sept 27 was dashed by Jamal.

While the ugly episode may be confined to Petaling Street, it certainly sent shock waves across the country, with many Chinese fearing that this was just the beginning.

There were some Chinese folks who actually stocked up on food supplies after Jamal's threat of a possible riot.

It brought back memories of the tragic May 13, 1969 racial riot.

Another incident that was a bitter pill to swallow for the community was Umno's Pasir Salak MP Datuk Seri Tajuddin Abdul Rahman's threat to slap the Chinese for bringing their complaints abroad.

At the general assembly, MCA president Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai

relayed his unease to Najib, saying: "I am concerned, Datuk Seri. Very, very concerned.

"I am certain the *rakyat* are anxious, worried and upset about what is going on.

"This is because the sentiments of hatred and extremism that plague our society are growing at an alarming pace. It is not only limited to politics but it is beginning to spread into our everyday lives."

In return, Najib in his opening speech, went all out to allay the fears of the Chinese, from assuring everyone that Chinese primary schools were here to stay to expressing his readiness to help small and medium enterprises.

He also encouraged MCA to do better in the coming general election and said that it had hurt him to hear MCA nicknamed "7-Eleven" (a convenience store) after winning only seven parliamentary seats and 11 state seats in the last general election.

He also assured the people that Barisan rejected in total all forms of extremism and that MCA has a voice in the coalition and has been voicing the concerns of the Chinese community.

The Prime Minister has also likened the on-going racial tensions to the haze. He gave his assurance that it will blow over after a while.

Let's hope that the political haze will clear up soon.