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PM: Be cautious in using social media

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'CLICK-BAIT': Net a powerful tool that can shape or dismantle society'

**SITI NURSURAYA ALI
AND THARANYA ARUMUGAM**
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak wants Internet users to be able to differentiate the truth, half-truths, lies and opinion before making their own judgment.

He said the Internet was a powerful tool that could shape or dismantle society, and was also a great space for discourse.

"We must be cautious when sharing information on social media. We must use the Internet and social media as a platform to promote unity and prevent it from being hijacked," he wrote in his blog najibrzak.com yesterday.

Najib said the Internet had transformed the way people transferred and received information as everything moved at a faster pace and information was exchanged and conveyed in almost real time, and the government was expected to do the same.

"Unfortunately, sometimes, technology is abused to incite racism or religious intolerance instead."

Najib said the battle of perception would be a continuous one as the Internet was an open space for the voices of the people.

"But, it is up to us to stay true to the path of moderation and not fall prey to the misconstrued agenda by irresponsible users," he said, adding that keyboard warriors, cybertroopers and news portals had made the

online world their "playground", constructing their own version of "reality" with click-bait headlines that served their own agendas.

This, according to Najib, was an unhealthy practice of journalism.

He described those who misused the Internet as "bad apples" and said Malaysians should not allow these acts to mislead them as there were people who used the Internet with good intentions.

"A true testament to our unity was when our country faced its toughest year in 2014. Our country was hit by the worst floods in decades.

"When Malaysia Airlines Flights MH370 and MH17 tragedies struck, there was an overwhelming sense of togetherness that cut through the political, racial and religious divide."

Najib said some Malaysian netizens became the main drivers for flood relief efforts and hashtags were created to spread words of encouragement during those challenging times.

"Social media became a part of the nation's support system. It was one of the few moments when the online and real worlds were aligned to serve a greater cause. It was a reflection of who we really are as a nation."

Najib said he recently met Malaysians who had dedicated their time to creating a better Malaysia online. One of them was Dr Raja Shamri Raja Hussin, or "Hero Banjir" as he is popularly known.

Dr Raja Shamri inspired the nation when his flood relief efforts in 2014 went viral.

Others included radio presenter and ambassador of organ donation Revathy Bawadas Kumar; ex-policeman Kuan Chee Heng, who leads 95,000 members of Community Policing Malaysia; Hospital Univer-

siti Kebangsaan Malaysia radiologist Dr Aznil Hisham, who seeks to foster unity among his online followers; and Global Peace Foundation chief executive officer Dr Teh Su Thye, who is also a member of the Committee to Promote Inter-faith Understanding and Harmony.

"These remarkable Malaysians have one thing in common — they use their influence online for the greater good.

"Their work has caught the attention and inspired thousands of followers to keep their optimism and belief in our beloved country."

Najib said the Internet was a shared property owned by all global citizens and everybody had the responsibility not to misuse it to ensure that unity and harmony was preserved.

Meanwhile, Najib said the government would pay special attention to developing the country's tourism sector to enhance economic growth.

This, he said, was in line with the government's commitment to prioritising economic growth to ensure the country records an increase in gross domestic product of between four and 4.5 per cent this year.

"Following the drop in world crude oil prices, the country's revenue has plunged by more than RM30 billion.

"If we fail to seek new sources of revenue to shoulder the shortfall from oil revenue, it will pose a grave impact on the people," Najib said in his blog post.

Najib, who is also finance minister, said Malaysia was renowned in the eco-tourism sector for having the world's most beautiful beaches and tropical forests rich in unique flora and fauna species.

The government, he said, was avidly carrying out promotions overseas, offering holiday packages to vacation in Malaysia.