

Umno not racist, says Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 1 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak came to Umno's defence today, saying his party is not racist and that it is in fact responsible for the country's current "social stability."

The Umno president said the Malay party had willingly co-operated with component Barisan Nasional parties MCA and MIC for a "bigger purpose" back in the 1950s to form a government and gain independence.

"It has been proven from a long time back, Umno is not a racist organisation.

"Umno is in reality a catalyst of the co-operative spirit between races which finally created social stability and brought about national harmony," Najib (picture) said in his presidential address at the Umno general assembly here.

The prime minister has repeatedly pleaded to Umno delegates to adopt a more moderate approach, but his pleas appear to have gone unheeded.

Party conservatives have already been roused over the past two days by speeches demonising Pakatan Rakyat as anti-Malay, anti-Islam, "agents of Christianisation", "bapok" (transvestites), "bangsat" (bastards) and "pondan" (effeminate).

Najib said in 1955, during the country's first election before independence, Umno had already shown its "sincerity" in sharing power among other races by ceding Malay-majority seats to other component parties.

"Umno was willing (even) back then to vote candidates not from their own race, for a bigger purpose, for winning elections, forming a government and then independence," he added.

Najib said Umno was more "democratic" compared to all three PR parties.

"We allow many people in Umno to choose their leaders and Umno is not a party that is afraid of democracy compared to our competitors," he said.

Umno goes into what is likely to be its last general assembly before a general election expected early next year.

Prime Minister Najib is said to need a marked improvement from the last polls to retain his position and only a return of Barisan Nasional's (BN) customary two-thirds majority of Parliament can guarantee he remains in office.

BN ceded 82 federal seats and five state governments to the opposition in the landmark March 2008 general election.

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