

Najib says committed to reforms, will not bow to pressure

The Malaysian Insider

December 31, 2011

By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 31 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today the government will not succumb to pressure from any party in pursuing reforms announced by his administration.

The prime minister said in his New Year's address that the government was committed to the reform programme which is "not empty promises or unrealistic."

"This is the aspiration and desire of the public. This effort is for the future generations who have a right to live in hope not despair. We will not bow to pressure from any party that tries to foil this noble goal," he said.

Najib (picture) introduced various government and economic reform measures soon after taking over from Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in April 2009 in a bid to push the country from its Third-World status into a high-income bracket nation.

He recently announced the liberalisation of 17 service subsectors to allow 100 per cent foreign equity, adding to the 27 he had opened up in 2009.

However, pressure from Malay hardliners such as Perkasa and the United Malays National Economic Action Council (MTEM) has threatened to derail Putrajaya's efforts especially the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) and New Economic Model (NEM) which promise meritocracy and a more competitive market.

But Najib has also taken great pains to assure the politically-dominant Bumiputeras that they will continue to have a major share of the economy.

The Umno president announced earlier this year 43 per cent, or RM8 billion, of civil engineering works in the Mass Rail Transit project would be given to Bumiputera contractors after complaints that they were shut out of the pre-qualifying tenders by project operator Syarikat Prasarana Negara Bhd (Prasarana).

Prasarana was the project owner until the Cabinet announced in August that a Finance Ministry company, MRT Co, would take over the project.

Najib also announced a raft of reforms following international condemnation of his administration's crackdown on the July 9 Bersih rally which saw tens of thousands marching for free and fair elections dispersed with mass arrests, water cannons and tear gas.

He set up a parliamentary select committee on electoral reforms, announced the repeal of three emergencies and the Internal Security Act (ISA) as well as doing away with section 27 of the Police Act that requires all public gatherings to have a police permit.

But the opposition has accused the PM of using stalling tactics as he has refused to guarantee that a general election will only be called after electoral reforms and the repeal of the ISA, which allows for detention without trial.

Critics have said the new Peaceful Assembly Bill, which bars street protests, is more

repressive than those in countries like Myanmar, which has one of the world's poorest human rights records.

Myanmar's military-dominated Parliament passed a law last week allowing street protests and a notice period of five days, fewer than the 10 days required by the Peaceful Assembly Bill.

The Bill prohibits assemblies from being held at dams, reservoirs, water catchment areas, water treatment plants, electricity generating stations, petrol stations, hospitals, fire stations, airports, railways, land public transport terminals, ports, canals, docks, wharves, piers, bridges, marinas, places of worship and kindergartens and schools.

But Najib said today the Political Transformation Programme must balance individual freedom with national security.

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