

Najib's reforms in 'dribs and drabs', says Ku Li
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By Lee Wei Lian

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 8 — Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah criticised the pace of reforms in the country today, saying that it was too inconsistent and there appeared to be no overall plan to transform the country and society.

The Umno veteran and president of newly registered civil society NGO Amanah (Angkatan Amanah Merdeka) said that while there have been initiatives such as the National Key Result Areas (NKRA's), they were currently too fragmented.

The PM's efforts at reform have received a mixed response from the public. — file pic
"I don't know actually because everything is done in dribs and drabs," he said at a press conference when asked about the government's reforms. "There is no overall plan as to how they are going to transform our country or society."

He added that it was "very difficult" for him to gauge what is going to happen in terms of transformation unless there is "a complete reformation."

Since taking office in 2009, Datuk Seri Najib Razak has initiated a reform agenda which included a government and economic transformation programme to be driven by the special purpose performance management unit, Pemandu.

While the prime minister has won praise for the bold move of proposing to repeal oppressive detention laws and relax media licensing laws, his reform efforts in terms of overhauling the government machinery and transforming the economy have been met with a less than effusive response from the public.

Critics say that the lack of radical reforms effectively amounted to policy tinkering that would deliver only lacklustre results.

Many members of the public also say that they do not feel any marked difference in their lives despite shiny statistics released periodically by Pemandu showing achievements such as a reduction in the crime rate and billions in new investment.

Government officials and some economists, however, have pointed to Malaysia's rise in rankings such as the World Economic Forum's Competitiveness Index and the World Bank's Doing Business Index this year as proof that Najib's reforms are working.

The prime minister, however, is also perceived to be constrained by hardliners in his party who would be opposed to widespread economic reforms that would entail levels of liberalisation that could threaten the rice bowls of politically connected businessmen.

Some corporate and political leaders also have said that the government is so set in its ways that Najib faces an uphill battle to break bad habits that have taken root over the decades.

"In corporations you can hire and fire fast but to take disciplinary action in government is extremely time consuming," said Minister in Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Koh Tsu

Koon last week.

Some analysts say that the prime minister could be holding out for a strong mandate from the 13th general election before embarking on more sweeping reforms.

The Wall Street Journal, however, said on September 28 that Najib would need to commit to reforms if he intends to propel Umno and Barisan Nasional to victory in the next general election as many members of the younger generation of voters do not feel beholden to the ruling coalition.

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