

Hadi: 'Negara Berkebajikan' for all, not just Malays
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 10 — The Islamist concept of a "Negara Berkebajikan" mooted by PAS is for the welfare of all communities and not just for Malays or Muslims, its president Datuk Seri Hadi Awang said today.

Hadi, who had mooted the idea in June to counter the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government's welfare state argument, admitted to The Malaysian Insider today the concept was aimed at winning votes for the looming 13th general election.

Hadi said PAS 'wants everyone's votes, not just the Malays'. — File pic
But he insisted the concept would benefit all citizens regardless of ethnicity and faith, and was not pandering to the Malay majority, contrary to a recent report by international weekly The Economist.

"We want everyone's votes, not just the Malays," he told The Malaysian Insider today after opening the day-long "Negara Berkebajikan" party convention, aimed at educating its grassroots members on what the concept means.

He said that it was because the voters were not limited to within the Malay community but also from other ethnicities.

The Economist took aim at Malaysia's lop-sided racial policies in its latest issue and expects both the BN and the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) to pander to the Malay vote despite the risk of further damage to already frail ethnic ties.

In its report, it said both the BN coalition and PR are targeting Malay votes as reforms take a back seat.

"Both government and opposition talk of dismantling these privileges, which have contributed to corruption and large-scale emigration," it said, adding that with elections looming "it is the Malay voter whose opinion matters, and he is assumed to resent any effort to curtail his privileges".

While Hadi did not seem to agree with the influential news magazine's analysis, he did not deny that the proposed raft of benefits underlined under its "Negara Berkebajikan" manifesto would benefit the Malay population.

He said this was because the Malays formed the biggest group in the country, and were also the majority of the Bumiputera population who are entitled to certain rights as laid out in the Federal Constitution.

"It is our responsibility to rectify the situation. We are fair to all," Hadi said.

PAS, which has been in power in Kelantan for close to two decades, has been viewed with suspicion by both Muslims and non-Muslims outside the state, especially those living on the west coast of the peninsula.

But this negative perception has been changing along with the change of guards in the party's top leadership following party election this year.

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