

Mukhriz confirms Najib wants meritocracy for Malays
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 18 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak's call for meritocracy over the weekend meant finding the best Malays in the country but not abolishing pro-Bumiputera policies despite liberalising the economy, says Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir.

The prime minister was reported to have said that affirmative action under the New Economic Policy (NEP) is "here to stay" by a pro-Umno blogger who attended a closed-door session with the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) Junior Science College alumni.

Mukhriz (picture), who is the alumni president, confirmed the blog report with The Malaysian Insider, saying yesterday that Najib's message was "that we are getting rid of rent-seekers and helping Malays become more competitive instead."

The report quoted Najib as saying that the NEP would not be abolished but that meritocracy would be implemented among Malays to find "the best amongst Malays."

"We no longer want to see Malay businessmen sell away assets, especially when they face a major crisis. We have seen this before.

"If I wanted to be popular, then I would pander to the economic rent-seekers," he was quoted as saying by a blog.

The Umno president was reported as explaining that government-linked companies (GLCs) prioritised doing business with Malay companies because "when they go outside, their new markets ask them 'did your government buy your product?'"

He said last month there was a need to eventually do away with Bumiputera quotas but said the government must continue to support the community's best talent to ensure a more competitive business environment.

Although Najib quickly insisted he had no intention to abolish quotas immediately, he has continued to stress that Malays should no longer "hide" behind government protection.

He told Malay economic NGOs last month that his New Economic Model (NEM) promotes affirmative action based more on meritocracy, saying "we must promote the right Bumiputera."

Najib has moved to liberalise the economy since taking office in April 2009, most recently removing Bumiputera equity requirements for 17 services subsectors.

But analysts have said that his plans are being threatened by Malay hardliners who have forced Putrajaya to revise pre-qualification criteria for the RM50 billion Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) mega project and sale conditions of billion-ringgit prime land by UDA Holdings — a government agency tasked with boosting Bumiputera participation in the urban economy.

Najib, who is expected to call for a general election soon, has also intervened personally in

the so-called Bumiputera Agenda, carving out for them RM8 billion or 43 per cent of civil engineering work for the MRT.

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