

Najib says meritocracy alone will lead to inequality
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By Clara Chooi

SHAH ALAM, Aug 19 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak sought today to justify his administration's apparent return to affirmative action policies to boost the Bumiputera economy, saying a system based 100 per cent on meritocracy would lead to inequality.

"We must have a blend of meritocracy and social justice. If there is no meritocracy, completely no meritocracy, what will happen to our country? We will be a nation of mediocrity," the prime minister said today.

The prime minister told a convention here that the government's "new system" was to use meritocracy among Bumiputeras by identifying and rewarding sincere and deserving Malay businesses while at the same time creating a more competitive environment to enhance the Malay economy.

He said focussing entirely on meritocracy would not be fair to individuals living in rural and suburban areas, claiming they would not be able to compete on a level playing field with those living in urban centres.

"Yes, some have said that the time has arrived that we no longer need affirmative action, some say we can scrap the quota system, we do not need this and that... and that we should practise full meritocracy.

"This is not coming from the non-Malays alone but the Malays themselves, the so-called liberal Malays," Najib said in his keynote address at the opening of the "Strengthening the New Economic Model — 1 Jihad Bumiputera Economy" convention at Universiti Teknologi Mara here.

"I say that it is true that the non-Malays became rich because of hard work but it is no less important to note that they became rich also because of our country's stability and a sound administration... because when they needed money, we gave it to them, even from before," he said.

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Najib said Umno and Barisan Nasional (BN) should be partly credited for being "considerate" and "fair" to the non-Malays, resulting in an environment that enabled their businesses to thrive.

"But do not now fail to be considerate to the Malays as well... they (non-Malays) should also be fair because Malays are presently at a disadvantage.

"Perhaps they say 40 years (of affirmative action) is enough but a large number of living in rural and suburban areas still need government aid through rewarding policies. So depending solely on meritocracy would be unfair," he said.

Najib cited the example of villagers from Kampung Bantal and Kampung Pagi in Ulu Tembeling, Pahang, saying the former village was named such as those attempting to travel there would immediately want to sleep on the "bantal" or pillow upon arrival due to the long

and tiring journey.

Kampung Pagi, on the other hand, was aptly named as one would only be able to reach there the following "pagi" or morning, he said.

"Now compare those living in these villages to those raised in Kenny Hills or the Klang Valley. If we do not help those in the villages, they would likely never experience better living conditions," he said.

Critics have accused Najib of diluting his New Economic Model (NEM) by creating agencies like Teraju and failing to focus on needs and merit-based affirmative action policies but government officials said the move was necessary as Bumiputera equity in the economy remained low despite the billions doled out since the New Economic Policy (NEP) began in 1971.

He mentioned Teraju's recently launched programme to train 1,100 top small, micro and medium-sized Bumiputera companies under a special entrepreneurship programme, saying the database was now being prepared and the programme will kick off soon.

"Insyallah this programme will follow this system of meritocracy among the Bumiputeras. There will no longer be the question of cronies or who knows who in order to succeed," he said.

Najib also urged successful Bumiputera firms to launch entrepreneurship opportunities for other smaller Bumiputera firms as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes, saying this could help boost the Malay economy further.

"We must not be afraid of change. If we want to survive the changing times, we must accept change and adapt so that we can excel in a more competitive environment. The era of liberalisation is something we cannot avoid... we must be willing to strive and while the government is committed, you must also help yourself to be successful," he said.

Najib hoped the Malay race would be declared "developed and successful" once Malaysia achieves its developed nation goal on January 1, 2020.

"Co-operate with us, with the NGOs... and it does not matter how many NGOs, so long as we stand together on one ship, and no other ship because this is the only ship that fights for the Bumiputera-Malay agenda," he said.

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