

Najib praises Britain for rejecting extremism
The Malaysian Insider
August 29, 2011
By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 29 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak has thanked Britons for the support given to Malaysian student Ashraf Haziq, who was mugged and beaten in the London riots earlier this month.

In a letter published by The Times, the prime minister said that the “tens of thousands” who showed their concern for Ashraf, who had only arrived in London weeks before, had “defended so vigorously” values he espoused in his “Movement of the Moderates” speech at the United Nations last year.

“At the United Nations last year, I called on world leaders to fight extremism of all kinds by establishing a global “Movement of the Moderates.”

“It is those values... that have been defended so vigorously by the people of Britain in recent weeks,” he wrote in the major British newspaper.

The letter comes after a spell of stinging criticism in the UK and international press during and after his visit to London in early July, following Putrajaya’s clampdown on the July 9 Bersih rally which saw police fire tear gas and water cannon at tens of thousands of demonstrators calling for free and fair elections.

The Najib administration had scrambled to limit the damage after the rally, which saw nearly 1,700 arrested, scores injured and the death of one ex-soldier.

The Barisan Nasional (BN) government’s censoring of an article about the Bersih rally by London-based weekly The Economist also drew widespread derision.

Najib (picture) has sought to repair the damage to his image as a moderate Muslim leader by announcing a parliamentary select committee on electoral reforms and also a review on censorship policies.

In his letter today, the Umno president thanked London for proving that it “is a city where outsiders are welcome but extremists are not.”

“In Malaysia this incident — so senseless, so callous and so brutal — shocked us to the core. Many of us have spent time in your city and have a great affection for it. But this was a side to London that none of us had seen before.

“But in the days that followed Britain showed its true face to the world. First came the very public anger towards Ashraf’s attackers. Tens of thousands of you in Britain took to the internet to express your revulsion at what you had seen. This wave of anger was followed by a huge outpouring of concern, assistance and support.

“In an age where some still try to drive wedges between races and religions, the ordinary people of Britain did not hesitate to open their hearts to a young Malaysian Muslim,” he wrote.

But in Kuala Lumpur, religious tensions are running high as Muslim groups and the Umno-owned Utusan Malaysia claim that the church has made numerous attempts to

proselytise poor Muslims.

Ashraf had been assaulted by a 20-strong gang who knocked him to the ground, breaking his jaw and stealing his bicycle. Then a group of hooded youths appeared to help him to his feet but then quickly rifled through his rucksack, stealing his mobile phone, wallet and PSP games console.

The footage of the mob surrounding Ashraf was posted on video-sharing site YouTube, which Najib said today made Ashraf the "global face of the riots" and looting that saw at least five deaths, 16 injuries and 3,000 arrests.

The Malaysian Insider

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