

Muhyiddin says Bumi agenda still top priority
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SHAH ALAM, Aug 20 — Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin assured the Malays today that the federal government still prioritised Bumiputera interests, contrary to the perception among the country's dominant majority.

Several businessmen groups and Malay rights movement Perkasa have questioned the Najib administration's commitment to expand the Bumiputera share of the economy, which has yet to reach 30 per cent according to government figures.

"I've received views that the current leadership no longer prioritises Bumiputera interests, that we've put aside this important agenda," said Muhyiddin (picture) in his closing speech today at the "Strengthening the New Economic Model — 1 Jihad Bumiputera Economy" convention at Universiti Teknologi Mara here.

"(But) the reality is that the Bumiputera agenda is still our government's main agenda," he added, as loud applause rang through the crowded hall.

The Umno deputy president stressed that although the government did not repeatedly state the importance of Bumiputera interests in the nation's economic development, "the main agenda is to defend all races and within that agenda is the fact that Malays and Bumiputeras should not be abandoned."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak told the same convention yesterday that a system based fully on meritocracy would lead to inequality.

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

Perkasa has supported Najib's remarks, pointing out that the Malays were still backwards economically.

"Bumiputeras form 40 per cent of the low-income group... we see that Bumiputera participation (in the economy) has increased, but it has yet to reach 30 per cent," said Muhyiddin today.

Najib's and Muhyiddin's remarks come ahead of a general election that is expected to be held within a year.

Critics have accused Najib of diluting his New Economic Model (NEM) by creating agencies like the Bumiputera Agenda Driving Unit (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.

Muhyiddin called today for Teraju to be strengthened, saying: "This is not a unit; it's a

full-fledged organisation.”

“Some say that it (Teraju) is not the same standard as Pemandu, (but) we know that by 2020, there must be active participation from able Bumiputera companies.”

The Malay Economic Advisory Council (Mapem), an umbrella body comprising 50 Malay economic non-governmental organisations, complained last month that Teraju — which was launched last February — had yet to improve Bumiputera participation in the government’s Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) amid a slew of projects launched by Pemandu.

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