

**Najib must show firm hand to stay in control, says Zaid
Malaysian Insider
June 10, 2013
BY CLARA CHOOI**

KUALA LUMPUR, June 10 – Datuk Seri Najib Razak needs to prove himself a strong leader and show the kind of decisiveness that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had, former Umno minister Datuk Zaid Ibrahim said today, noting that the country's stability was contingent on this.

Zaid (picture), once a supreme council member in the ruling Umno, said the prime minister must end racial polarisation here by making a clear stand on the matter, stop newspapers like Utusan Malaysia from further provoking the Chinese community and show a stern hand in efforts to end power abuses and corruption in his government.

Najib, he added, must become a leader whom the Malays can implicitly trust as one who would not let them down, despite his show of inclusiveness and fairness to other ethnic groups.

"Umno cannot function when its leader is weak, and neither can the country. The many years of indoctrination, including the inculcation of fear of threats from other ethnic communities, require that Umno have a strong leader.

"This leader is someone who doesn't fear his own family or the Umno warlords, and who can employ the strength of his convictions and intellect to push his economic and social agenda successfully," Zaid said, according to a copy of his speech text that was presented to members of the Rotary Club of Pudu at Shangri-La Hotel here today.

The former Umno-turned-PKR member cited Dr Mahathir as an example of a strong leader, saying that although the former prime minister had committed some errors during his tenure, he had always had the trust of the Umno Malays.

Zaid recalled that during his stint, Dr Mahathir had never been as harsh on the Chinese community as he has been today, noting that he always had the community's backing.

"He was a strong Malay leader who was acceptable to most non-Malays," he said.

Ticking off examples, Zaid reminded that Dr Mahathir had even been strong enough to dismantle the New Economic Policy (NEP) to replace it with the National Development Policy (NDP) and had fathered Vision 2020, which articulated a future for a multiracial nation.

Dr Mahathir had also made school children to learn Mathematics and Science in English, he pointed out.

"There was no Utusan to mock or attack him and his policies, and there was no backlash from Umno businessmen because he had the foresight to distribute the country's largesse fairly," Zaid said.

"That's what a strong Umno leader is capable of," he added.

But today, Najib, who was just recently sworn in for his second term as prime minister after a divisive general election, does not fit the frame of such a strong leader, Zaid said.

He said the son of former prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and today lives the life of the rich and famous.

"He (Najib) is not perturbed by his family's spending sprees, even though many Malaysians are still languishing in the low-income bracket.

"He has never been a natural leader known for his beliefs and convictions. That's why his so-called reforms and transformation plans seem so dangerous to Umno Malays.

"He has no history of doing enough for them and so they are worried his transformation plans would be to their detriment," Zaid said.

The key challenge for Najib today, he added, lies in the Umno president's ability to prove his mettle and convince the country's largest ethnic group and his own party that his transformation plans would not see their interests ditched.

Any form of transformation, if carried out haphazardly by a weak leader, would be seen as "selling out" and will eventually fail, Zaid said.

Noting that Umno's internal polls are looming, the former minister said that Najib needs to tackle current problems with determination to cement his position without displaying extremism that might frighten off his support from the non-Malays.

"What will all of this mean for the country? A strong leader is what the country needs from whichever side he comes from.

"He will be able to better control the excesses in the country's politics (including his own party), which means incidents of harassing the other side – be it the Opposition or Government– will be reduced," Zaid said.

"For now, I believe a strong leader in Umno will go a long way towards bringing stability to the country."

Najib led Barisan Nasional (BN) to victory in the just-concluded 13th general election but the ruling pact took a severe beating from the opposition, losing an additional seven federal seats to Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

The prime minister has since had to deal with a wounded nation as Malaysia, post-polls, saw racial polarisation worsen and a wider rural-urban rift.

In the bleakness surrounding a pale victory, Najib described the results of Election 2013 as a "Chinese tsunami", earning widespread criticism for allegedly characterising the polls as a Chinese versus Malay contest.

The Umno-owned daily Utusan Malaysia fanned the fires further when it front-paged the incendiary headline titled "Apa lagi yang Cina mahu?" (What more do the Chinese want?).

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