

Najib's brother accused of undermining Umno by backing AirAsia X CEO
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 12 — Datuk Seri Nazir Razak was today faulted for plunging brother Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Umno deeper into a post-polls "crisis of confidence" following his defence of AirAsia X CEO Azran Osman Rani's against criticism from Utusan Malaysia.

Former Umno minister Tan Sri Zainuddin Maidin, or "Zam" as he is popularly called, accused Nazir of failing to understand that the ruling party may not have maintained its Malay support in Election 2013 without the Umno-owned newspaper.

He said Nazir, the CEO of CIMB Group and the younger brother to Prime Minister Najib, had likely thought that Barisan Nasional (BN) would recapture some of lost support from the Chinese had Utusan Malaysia not targeted the community.

"But in truth, Nazir only added to the problems faced by Datuk Seri Najib and Umno," the former minister said in a blog posting that was published in Utusan Malaysia today.

Utusan's "brave" backing of Umno in fighting off the anti-Umno elements that have eroded public confidence in the government had also opened the newspaper to financial risks, Zam said.

But this resulted in a stronger Umno representation in Parliament, its twin success in recapturing Kedah and Perak, and a larger number of state seats in the Kelantan legislative assembly, he noted.

On Monday, Nazir defended Azran for his forthright attitude in daring to criticise Utusan Malaysia, saying that this is the "mark of a leader".

Zam asked if labelling Azran forthright and frank meant Nazir was joining the ranks of those who have accused Utusan Malaysia of being racist.

"To me, the assumption that Utusan is racist is subjective. It depends on the school of thought or the leaning of a person, as well as his or her educational background... and this is every individual's respective right," he said.

"But what I feel was unsuitable was Azran's intolerant behaviour. Just because he disagreed with the paper's stand, he threatened to withdraw AirAsia advertisements.

"Sentiments and prejudice influenced his actions," Zam wrote.

"Is this the behaviour of an educated person who believes in freedom and democracy, openness and globalisation? Is this not considered an abuse of power or irrational action?" he asked.

Zam suggested insolence on Azran's part, accusing the AirAsia X chief of assuming that because Utusan Malaysia should follow his political leanings because it carried advertisements from the airlines.

"Utusan knows a lot of negative issues about AirAsia and has kept it under wraps, like the

other papers, for the sake of advertisements or money from it, but it looks like this alone is not good enough for AirAsia CEO Azran," he said.

"Surely his spirits will soar even higher with the support of Nazir, brother to Najib, the prime minister of Malaysia, who does not understand the crisis of confidence that Najib and Umno now faces," Zam added.

In the just-concluded May 5 polls, BN retained power but with a reduced seat margin, scoring 133 seats to Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) 89 seats in Parliament.

Amid the reduced victory, Umno emerged the most victorious among all BN component parties, sweeping up 88 seats — 11 seats more than the 79 it won in Election 2008.

A divided Malaysia emerged after the election and in his first speech to declare BN's victory, Najib said the results showed that a "Chinese tsunami" had occurred and declared the need for national reconciliation.

This set the tone for the post-polls discourse as many Umno and BN leaders, taking a leaf from the prime minister, set out to paint the general election as a Chinese versus Malay contest.

Malay-language Utusan Malaysia appeared to go on an anti-Chinese rampage, publishing daily articles on its front page and its editorials to criticise the community for bailing on BN in the polls.

One article, headlined "Apa lagi Cina mahu?" (What more do the Chinese want?), sparked massive outrage among the Chinese community and opposition politicians, and even went viral across the Internet as netizens slammed the Malay paper for being too overt in racist stance.

It was then that Azran, captain of the long-haul budget airline AirAsia X, took to his Twitter account to criticise Utusan Malaysia for what he reportedly saw as a racial instigation in the aftermath of the May 5 polls.

He was also reported to have criticised Malay group Perkasa for its hardline stance as an irrelevant organisation that had caused Malays to be myopic.

In response, the paper published daily views from Perkasa leaders, the Muslim Consumers Society of Malaysia and pro-Umno activists who slammed Azran, branding him "arrogant" and a Malay who had forgotten his roots.

On May 19, Utusan columnist Awang Selamat — the nom-de-plume for the paper's collective editorial voice — told the Umno-owned paper to stop taking the airline's ads until its sister company's chief executive apologises for criticising the broadsheet's racist piece.

Awang also called for a nationwide boycott on the airline.

"Awang would like to suggest that the Utusan Group not accept any AirAsia ad as long as there is no apology. Let the company's advertisement go to another paper, but not Utusan.

"Without AirAsia, Awang Selamat will not have any problem. Furthermore, the value of the advertisement given is very small, lower than advertisements for herbal and hair treatments," it said.

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