

## **Najib showcases "moderate Muslim" image as Malaysia vies for a seat on UN Security Council**

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**BY KEAN WONG IN NEW YORK FOR THE MALAYSIAN INSIDER**

In a United Nations General Assembly week spiked with breakthroughs in talks on Syria and Iran, Malaysia's bid for a coveted UN Security Council seat was previewed and praised when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak spoke at a Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) event in New York.

Western and Asean diplomats who attended the discussion about "moderate Muslims" and the Global Movement of Moderates, led by CNN host and foreign policy expert Fareed Zakaria, applauded Najib for his "rational arguments defending the voices of moderates" at a time of deepening religious divisions and conflict around the world.

The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, agreed that Najib previewed what they described as a "strong case, a substantial downpayment" for Malaysia's bid to join the UN's top decision-making body that has a mandate to enforce global peace and security.

The prime minister argued for "dialogue over confrontation, negotiation over conflict", in a year when permanent members of the Council such as the United States and France have been grappling with suitable responses to the violence in Egypt and Syria.

While the Security Council has five permanent members – a legacy of the post-1945 world – and retain veto power over resolutions for action by UN member states, the other 10 rotating member-states still play a key role in debating and deciding its binding resolutions that include peacekeeping operations (often dubbed the 'blue helmets' brigade), authorising military action and establishing sanctions (as is currently imposed on Iran).

Najib was also well-received in his address to the UN General Assembly's High-Level Meeting on nuclear disarmament yesterday, where he conveyed Malaysia's "deep concern" about the slow progress in eliminating nuclear weapons.

Malaysia is expected to formally register its interest in becoming one of the 10 rotating members of the Security Council when Najib addresses the UN General Assembly on Saturday.

The campaigning by Malaysia among other countries, which are split into regional blocs, will begin in earnest, with a clear indication of votes promised expected by summer next year. Should Malaysia win a seat, it will be the fifth time Malaysia is part of the Council since 1965.

According to sources at the UN familiar with the jostling that has already begun for the two-year session, Malaysia is a favourite because of its "moderate Muslim nation with a successful economy" reputation, as well as its previous strong record in supporting UN peace-keeping efforts around the world with troops and other material.

Malaysia is also favoured by the Western powers for its "reliability" as an ally in previous conflicts such as the first Gulf War, and for its leadership roles in the Muslim world such as in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

"Malaysia is seen as benign to all parties in serious schisms like the Shia-Sunni divide, and the looming confrontations the West is embroiled in with Syria and Iran," explained an official familiar with the rivals for the Asia-Pacific Group's seat allocation.

"Malaysia has been a safe, non-controversial, reliable global partner, and the country also favourably reflects necessary notions of respect, tolerance, and also a thriving economy," added the official.

The prime minister reinforced these themes of Malaysia at the Council on Foreign Relations's Global Movement of Moderates discussion, where he urged societies to "reject fanaticism or militancy and extremist thinking".

"You have to ask yourself, what is it that you want to achieve in Malaysia or any (other) society for that matter? We want to see peace, prosperity and harmony... our policies should be predicated on moderation then you have much more just, fair and inclusive society - you don't marginalise anyone.

"It requires us to be more vocal, to be articulate, and not allow the extremists to drown the voices of moderation. Not to allow racism, bigotry to occupy the voices of this world," Najib told the CFR audience. – September 28, 2013.

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