

Call on Umno members to emulate terror group shows Najib's desperation, say analysts
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Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak's call to party members to emulate a terrorist organisation showed his desperation amid waning support for Barisan Nasional, say political analysts.

They said that the statement, made to Umno members on Monday night, might further damage his moderate image which he is taking pains to present to the international stage, as well as Malaysia's reputation as a moderate Muslim country.

While they noted that the prime minister is not supporting militancy, they were surprised that Najib had named the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Isil), the militant al-Qaeda splinter group which recently took over the Iraqi city of Mosul, and whose alleged supporters were recently arrested by Malaysian authorities.

"It does show a certain sense of desperation on Najib's part that whatever reforms he wants to push through, it is not carried out because the expected followers are not behind him," said Dr Ooi Kee Beng, the deputy director of Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

"While the moderates in Umno are waiting for him to come out with clear reform agenda for the next four years, it seems he's waiting for his followers to lead.

"There seems to be a waiting game between the prime minister and moderates in his party."

At a dinner to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Cheras Umno branch on Monday, Najib said party members should emulate Isil as they were able to defeat an Iraqi force although they were outnumbered.

"Whether we agree or not is another matter, the group Isil with the strength of just 1,300 people, can defeat an Iraqi army of 30,000 soldiers, until four, five generals with three, four stars ran for their lives, jumped out the window at night," Najib was quoted as saying.

Observers felt he made such a statement out of desperation especially since support for his ruling coalition BN and his lynchpin Malay party, Umno, has been waning, as reflected in last year's May 5 national polls, where the coalition lost a further seven seats to Pakatan Rakyat (PR), despite Umno adding nine more parliamentary seats due to rural votes.

Ooi said Najib's remarks will definitely leave international observers confounded.

"It's a bit scary. It shows that he is not on top of his game.

"What does he want from this? There is no election around the corner," he added.

Analyst Khoo Kay Peng did not mince his word, saying it was the "most stupid statement" made by a Malaysian head of state.

"It is unbecoming of the prime minister. He has totally lost it," said Khoo.

He said Najib could have given the examples of other innovative and moderate movements.

"On one hand, we have Malaysian police trying to stop our citizens from joining Isil, on the other, we have the prime minister encouraging his members to emulate the bravery of the militant group.

"Is the prime minister encouraging Umno members to join the missions there?" he asked, adding that Najib should have spoken out against such militant organisations undermining an elected government.

"He represent all Malaysians. The image of Malaysia as a moderate Muslim country will go down the drain."

Ibrahim Suffian, who heads pollster Merdeka Center, said Najib's statement would create a negative perception towards the country especially in the wake of several religious and racially-charged issues.

"It is tough to put his statement in context, it will cause negative perception at the international level," said the Merdeka Center executive director, who agreed that Najib could have cited other examples without involving militants.

Ibrahim said as the chief administrator, Najib should not only place importance on political influence just to gain Malay support.

"He is a politician, he might have his own reasons for saying that. I think at this juncture, he really needs Malay support especially since the Federal

Court decision," he said, referring to Monday's Apex court decision upholding the ban on the word "Allah" in Catholic weekly Herald.

"He may be using this to strengthen Malay support."

Professor James Chin of Monash University Malaysia, expressing surprise that Najib used Isil as an example, however, believed the latest storm would not affect his image.

But Chin said it does not augur well for the premier to use such a poor example.

"It is extremely unwise for a political leader to suggest that such group should be emulated," he added. – June 25, 2014.

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