

**The good, the bad and the ugly of pep talks**  
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Just play along. Imagine for a moment that you are a school principal and you are in the midst of giving your students a pep talk on team work, and fighting to the bitter end to achieve your goals.

Would you ask the student population to emulate the doggedness of communist fighters; the tenacity of insurgents or the camaraderie of street gangs? Most likely not.

As a responsible leader, you would pick a world-class sportswoman like Nicol David or hail the unity of the no-hopers from Costa Rica who have shown in the World Cup that team work can sometimes compensate for paucity in talent.

You would not hail the qualities of criminals. Why? Because it would come across as you endorsing their way of life or glorifying them. And herein lies the problem with what Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said at an Umno event a few nights ago. Trying to rally the rank and file, he suggested that they must emulate the bravery of the Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant (Isil), a splinter group of Al-Qaeda and a terrorist organisation.

This is what Najib said: "For example, when someone dares to fight to their death, they can even defeat a much bigger team. As proof – 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 run for their lives, jump out of their window at night. Why? Because they are afraid of those who are brave."

There was surprise and bewilderment in and outside Malaysia that the PM would speak in such glowing terms of a terrorist organisation. And several websites, including The Malaysian Insider, said that speaking in support of Isil would send a wrong signal and legitimise the group at a time when Malaysians have been making their way to Iraq to link with Isil.

Understandably, the Prime Minister's Office has responded, issuing a statement today to say that comments attributed to Najib were taken out of context by "some websites."

"Isil was mentioned briefly and in passing, but it is important to note that the Prime Minister in no way indicated any support for Isil. Any allegation to the contrary is completely false," the statement read.

But did Najib extol the bravery of Isil fighters to Umno members? It appears he did. Out of the million and one examples in the world he could have picked from, why did he salute the virtues of a terrorist organisation?

Does he consider them brave? Does he consider the Malaysians who are fighting alongside Isil terrorists also to have bravery worth emulating?

Just curious. – June 26, 2014.

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