

Scorn, brickbats... welcome to Najib's social-media life
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Datuk Seri Najib Razak may have the most "likes" and "followers" of any Malaysian politician, but lately, he's also attracted the most scorn from social media users.

Although his posts still get more "likes" than negative comments, observers argue that the large amount of negativity towards Najib reflects a public mood soured by a stuttering economy and the unending stream of political bad news coming out of Putrajaya.

The amount of negativity on Facebook also raises the point of whether social media is promoting Najib's image, who is a self-described avid user.

Leaving aside his posts about the string of 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) issues, the prime minister received brickbats for all the other postings.

Whether it's mundane subjects such as the Nuzul Quran public holiday or well-wishes for Muslims to break their fast, Najib's posts on his Facebook get plenty of stick, sometimes numbering in the thousands.

Aside from the name-calling, most of the negative comments tend to centre around cost-of-living issues, such as the impact of the goods and services tax (GST) and the recent petrol price hike.

For instance, on June 30, Najib had posted on Facebook a picture of him with two poor children who received new Hari Raya clothes sponsored by the 1M4U youth movement.

The post received 13,740 likes and close to 4,800 comments, almost all of them negative and accusing the event as an attempt to whitewash the pain caused by inflation.

"Dia je baju baru.2 orang yang beebaju baru 2 boleh melupakan berjuta rakyat yang serba kekurangan. Awesome," said Facebook user Nazrin Sharip.

(Only these two got new clothes. Two can overlook millions who are destitute. Awesome.)

Another user Amran Mat said: "Berlakon je lebih..terima ksh sngt2 sbb berjaya memperbodohkn rakyat malaysia.." (They're just acting. Thank you so much for successfully for fooling Malaysians.)

Mohd Shahrul Aswad and scores of others posted: "Turunkan harga minyak Turunkan harga minyak" (bring down the petrol price).

A past New Straits Times report said Najib had the second most number of likes on Facebook behind former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

But a check today showed that Najib has surpassed Dr Mahathir. Najib has 2,786,309 "likes" to Dr Mahathir's 2,443,886.

On Twitter, Najib has 2.49 million followers versus Dr Mahathir's 312,000.

Zaharom Nain, a professor of communications and media studies, said social media could only go so far in creating good public relations and what mattered more was the person using it.

"It can't work for you if everything in your life is negative. It won't help you if you are in dire straits," said Zaharom of Nottingham University Malaysia.

Unlike previous prime ministers, Najib's life has been under a more intense microscope because of social media.

He has even talked about this before when comparing the challenges of his administration with that of Dr Mahathir, his mentor-turned-nemesis.

But another critical difference between Dr Mahathir and Najib, said Zaharom, was that the latter's family members were caught living luxuriously.

That narrative, which was also spread by social media, has overwhelmed Najib's attempts to project himself as being sensitive to the plight of the ordinary Malaysian, said Zaharom.

"The gulf between Najib's lifestyle and that of the people is so big and this did not exist with the previous prime ministers."

The criticism is also because of the nature of social media itself, which allowed the public to vent their anger towards top leaders, said Ibrahim Suffian of the Merdeka Center.

"Public opinion of the government and the prime minister has been going south since the GST, in places where most people are not middle class, the pressure is quite high."

This can be seen in a July 1 post on the national hockey team losing in the World Hockey League semi-finals which attracted 9,154 "likes" and 2,342 comments. The majority of criticism was on the GST and the price of petrol.

One commenter, Ramdhan Aidil Fahim said: "Kalau minyak x naik insyaAllah pasukan hoki kita akn menang smlm.. ni disebabkan kenaikan harga mnyak pasukan kita x dpt nk fokus 100% dlm game smlm.. fikiran terganggu disebabkan minyak naik lagi...."

("If the price of petrol did not go up, God willing, the hockey team would have won

last night. Our team could not focus 100% on the game because of the rise in petrol prices. Their concentration was affected because petrol went up again.)

The anxiety over the economy has been further worsened by allegations of irregularities in public financial institutions such as Tabung Haji, Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) and 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), said Ibrahim.

“Given the incessant negative flow of news and the lack of countervailing narrative from the PM, it’s no wonder that the comments are generally negative.” – July 7, 2015.

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