

**Size Of Component Parties In BN Not Important, Says Najib
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KOTA KINABALU, Nov 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today stressed that the size of a party that has become a partner in the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition is not important but what is more valued is the loyalty and commitment of the component parties to the BN.

Najib, who is also BN chairman, said it was because of this principle, which the coalition had upheld all along, that enabled the BN to continue to be in power irrespective of whether times were good or difficult.

"I as the BN chairman do not see too much into the size of the party. To me size doesn't matter, what matters is your loyalty and commitment. It is on this principle that country was able to move forward. We have succeeded because we have been able to capitalise when the going was good as well as ride out the storms.

"But the BN must continue to prove that it is the party that the people can depend on to look after the interests of all the people, irrespective of ethnicity or religion. The BN umbrella is inclusive and comprehensive," he said.

Najib said this when opening Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah's (PBRs) Triennial General Meeting here today. Also present were Sabah Chief Minister and Sabah BN chairman Datuk Seri Musa Aman and PBRs president Tan Sri Joseph Kurup.

As such, Najib asked the 13 parties in the coalition to defend the principle which calls on all the components to interact to find consensus and understanding as well as cooperation to achieve the BN's main objective, that is forming a strong government.

He said no matter the issue or problem, all BN components should be determined not to stray from the objective because there could not be a bigger consideration than forming a strong BN government.

"Considerations of a narrow nature, or parochial, being too inward looking, to the point it jeopardises the main objective, we must put it aside because if we do not have political power, it will all be meaningless to us.

"Better that we sacrifice a bit so long as power still lies with the BN. If we have the power, it means our struggle can still continue even though we might not get all that we want," stressed Najib.

Najib admitted that there were still requests from BN components that have not been met but believed all BN members faced the same situation and that space to consider these demands was still there and that it could be settled in the BN family spirit

"I, as Chairman of BN adhere to the principle that I must be fair to all BN component parties and to be fair to all people, whether in urban or rural areas, poor or well off, or whether they are Bumiputera or non-Bumiputera, or non-Muslim Bumiputera, even though they are a minority" said Najib.

For example, he said, the government decided to eliminate the 'Others' column in official government forms because the indigenous groups in Sabah and Sarawak did not like to be categorised so.

On concerns of Christians in Sabah about conversion to another religion, Najib clarified that there was no government policy that could force anyone to embrace Islam, and Islam itself did not force others to embrace the religion.

"And from the government's point of view, we hold the principle that there is no compulsion in Islam. In Islam itself there is a verse that says 'No compulsion in Islam. To you, your religion, and to me, my religion'. This means there is no compulsion in Islam. If he or she wants convert to Islam yes, but there is no compulsion in Islam," he said.

Najib gave assurances that the government would continue to adhere to the principle and in the event such coercion occurred, it would be purely an act of the certain individual, and that the affected parties could complain to the authorities.

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