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Sixth in the Bernama series to mark the 50th anniversary of Umno
UMNO IN THE EYES OF A LEADER

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KUALA LUMPUR: Much has been said about the struggle, achievements and future of UMNO as the party prepares to celebrate its 50th anniversary on May 11.

But how do the younger leaders view the party, they being the leaders to steer the country in the new millennium? What are their aspirations and hopes for the party and nation?

One such young leader is Senator Datuk Haji Ibrahim, though he may not be a big name in the party hierarchy. He is merely an UMNO Supreme Council member, a senator, Kelantan UMNO Information Chief and Pasir Mas UMNO Division leader.

Ibrahim can be considered as a party idealist, whose views and ideas are, more often than not, very relevant to the UMNO struggle.

Followings are excerpts of Ibrahim's answers to Bernama's questions pertaining to the various aspects of UMNO's past, present and future struggle:

Q: From the younger generation's point of view, what are the obvious contributions of UMNO towards the country's political, economic and social stability?

A: UMNO as a vehicle for the people's political, economic and social struggle, particularly for the Malays, had succeeded in creating awareness among the younger Malays on the importance of political power to continue to be firmly in their hands. UMNO's struggle had also succeeded in raising the image of the Malays through the creation of many intellectuals and corporate figures from among the race.

The high political consciousness among the Malays and their ability to enjoy better education and the economic prosperity of the country are the obvious manifestation of UMNO's contribution to the nation's political, economic and social stability.

Q: Do you think UMNO had done enough to promote unity among the people, or, are there still avenues which could further enhance the integration process of the various races in the country?

A: UMNO is fully aware that racial unity is the key to the national stability. While it may be a Malay or Bumiputera-based party, UMNO has sufficient rooms for cooperation with other political parties which represent other races in the Barisan Nasional.

The BN institution itself is a manifestation of a harmonious racial unity in the country for, through the coalition, all political parties could work together to create a just and equitable government, without neglecting the interests of any single race.

The people of different races and origin acknowledged the reality that national unity is the core to the people's socio-economic progress and the development of the nation.

I am optimistic that a certain ideal level of national unity can be achieved in tandem with the achievement of the Vision 2020 as visualised by the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

However, efforts to strengthen unity must continue to be undertaken because under the present condition, there are bound to be certain quarters who are out to destroy our peace and prosperity, out of mere jealousy.

The process of moulding racial unity is a continuous process of socio-economic development, which should be the main agenda of the national development programme.

We should shift each and everyone's paradigm, not just at the leadership level but also among the new generations, including students, because unity must be carved out of consciousness and genuine understanding of the fact that Malaysia is a multi-racial country.

Q: The opposition parties have portrayed UMNO as a racialist party, just as the MCA and the MIC. They also allege that the pact between the parties which represent the three major races - the Malays, Chinese and the Indians - is fragile and could easily break if one of the parties feels that the interests of the race it represents are being threatened. What do you think of this?

A: I think racial issue is universal due to the different characteristics of human beings. It exists everywhere, between people of different races, religions, customs and even from among the same race.

In the Malaysian context, it cannot be denied that racial politics used to be the crux of the struggle of almost all the political parties. However, the wisdom of our past leaders had given birth to a "front" in the form of the political pact by the parties which represent the country's main races.

Through the pact, a power-sharing system of government through democracy was formulated. It was then that the shoots of "racial unity", in the political power-sharing sense, began to sprout and grew to its present shape.

I believe all migrant races are fully conscious of the fact that it was impossible for them to enjoy the present prosperity, peace and security if there was no unity and unity can only be achieved through political consensus and economic stability. In conclusion, I strongly believe that racial unity in Malaysia will persist and grow stronger due to the prevailing moderation among the BN's component parties.

I don't think the majority of the non-Malays here have any doubt as to their interest and welfare as a citizen. Racial issues are only being deliberately harped upon by chauvinists for their own selfish ends.

Q: What should UMNO do in approaching the new century to ensure that Malaysia continues to be a peaceful, prosperous and stable country.

A: UMNO must get stronger, courageous and solid. Unity from within UMNO must be enhanced, its membership must be expanded to pave way for greater participation of the educated Malays and the party leadership must always be prepared to face and accept changes according to circumstances and times.

Q: What has UMNO to do to remain a democratic and pragmatic political party and are the present second echelon leaders capable of maintaining the status-quo?

A: UMNO must be ready to adapt to changes in term of party struggle and strategies because its target also changes according to the evolution of time. The party leaders and members should also shift their paradigm for a "mind-set" which is receptive to changes.

Q: What should party do to break the political walls which continue to divide the Malays and get them under a stronger UMNO banner?

A: UMNO's doors are always open to all Malays and eligible Bumiputeras and it is always the hope of our leaders to bring them under our shelter.

Our struggle is genuine and never deviates from the basic principle of protecting and fighting for the rights of the Malays with the objective of ensuring that they continue to dominate the national political leadership.

-- Bernama

AM KGO