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Convention-Najib

UMNO STILL THE SAME THOUGH MANY PROFESSIONALS HAVE BECOME ITS LEADERS

KUALA LUMPUR, May 11 (Bernama) -- Umno is still a democratic organisation fighting for all groups although many middle-class people and professionals have assumed leadership of the party, Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today.

He said these groups continued to increase but the leadership they provided was still sensitive to the aspirations of the ordinary Malays.

"Herein lies the strength of Umno over the last 50 years," he said at the opening of the party's 50th anniversary convention by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here.

Umno, which began as a Malay movement 50 years ago, could still retain a large part of its original features despite radical changes to the social structure of the Malays, leadership composition and party membership.

Najib, who is Education Minister and convention chairman, said Umno was able to overcome the internal and external challenges it faced without forgoing its Malay features.

He said that until today the party's relevance to the Malays had never diminished but instead its attraction to the Malays continued to increase.

"The total number of Umno members now exceeds 2.4 million, representing 42 per cent of the 5.6 million Malays eligible to join, and this is a world record," he said.

He said that as almost all Umno members were Muslims, the claim that Umno was one of the biggest Muslim parties in the world was not wrong.

Najib said: "Umno belongs to the Malays and let us acknowledge that it is the only viable platform to lead them into the 21st century."

"As such, we must realise that we are merely trustees of the Malays, that we can come and go but Umno will remain the platform for their struggle in future," he added.

Najib said: "No one can deny that Umno is the only political party responsible for improving the plight of the Malays -- from a weak peasant society to become a modern race to be at par and to stand tall with other developed nations."

Umno had not only succeeded in defending the dignity of the Malays but had led the struggle for independence of the country, he said.

Umno was very fortunate as its successive leaders comprised people of integrity who were far-sighted and understood the aspirations of the Malays.

He said Umno was also fortunate in having Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as its leader.

Given his sensitivity and vision, Dr Mahathir was leading the party and country into a new era and century filled with various challenges.

The changes in approach and policies to keep up with the times had changed the world view of the people and the country, he said.

Malaysia was now reknowned and respected worldwide as a model nation with regard to its political stability, racial harmony, economic progress and practice of Islam, he said.

"We are all confident that the leadership of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad aided by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will lead the nation to greater heights," he said. -- BERNAMA

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