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The party in power is judged principally by performance

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Of importance in more ways than one is the current session of the Umno General-Assembly, the first with the advent of the new century and new millenium. Already chosen is the leadership which will lead the nation into the future.

Once said about politics in Britain, home of party politics, is that power is sought by many but only some will attain it.

More important, it has been reminded, is one who not only wields power but also moulds the future of the country.

The continuity of Umno's leadership has undoubtedly been due also to the support gained from before independence from the Chinese, Indians, Dayaks, Kadazan-Dusun and other ethnic groups.

In the search for meaning a look back to the past might not be inappropriate in the present context. As with individuals there are memories and moments of nostalgia too for a political party.

The co-operation between Umno and MCA in the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections in 1952 which gave birth to the Alliance was transformed into the Barisan Nasional with 14 component parties in 1974 during Tun Razak's premiership. Even Pas, the main Malay opposition was a member.

Formed in 1946 to counter the Malayan Union imposed by the British, Umno was impelled by the imperatives of Malay heritage and indeed, its survival. Hidup Melayu became its slogan.

Some five years later Umno Youth changed the slogan to "Merdeka". Among those who played a key role in the decision was Razak, in his capacity as youth leader.

Brought up in the Umno General Assembly on 24-25 March, the new slogan was again accepted, with 34 voting in favour and 23 against. That conservatism was still strong was reflected in the vote count.

On 27 June, 1951 the Umno Secretary-General, Hussein Onn informed party members that Datuk Onn would not be defending his party presidency as he was leaving to form the IMP (Independence for Malaya Party).

Among those who opposed was Razak who reminded Datuk Onn that if he left Umno he would lose his political base.

In the biannual Umno Assembly on 29-30 March 1952, the position of Deputy President was created and then President Tunku Abdul Rahman persuaded Razak to contest.

In the event he was challenged by Mustapha Hussain, a left-wing leader. Razak won although with a not comfortable majority.

Thus sealed was Razak's association with Tunku until the latter become Prime Minister on attainment of independence. Razak succeeded him some 12 years later in September 1970.

Brought in later to join his cabinet was Hussein Onn, first as Education Minister and later as deputy Prime mInister.

Invited back into the party was Dr Mahathir Mohamad, together with Musa Hitam. The rest is history.

Among reasons for Umno's strength is its capacity to face opposition challenges from whichever quarter.

As has been stated the opposition could confine themselves to promises whilst the government is judged by results.

Perhaps there was a lesson drawn also from the old Labour Party in Britain which failed in successive elections after winning the first at the end of World War Two. Noted was the failure of the Labour Party to

talk to, and listen to the people instead of only to themselves.

As acknowledged Umno members are not a namby-pamby lot and they do not accept political ukases without demur. Self-scrutiny is evident at various levels.

Added proof was the run-up to the supreme council elections amid repeated reminders about the dangers of money politics.

Much earlier was the birth of Semangat 46 and its aftermath. Who was it who said that friends make more tempting targets than enemies?

On the edge of Kampong Baru, just three kilometres from the venue of the Umno General Assembly is an old two-storey hotel built some 60 years ago and named New Hotel.

It was where some Umno delegates stayed during Umno assemblies in the old days. Still remembered by this scribe was Wan Kadir Ismail from Terengganu, later Deputy Minister.

The rooms were not air-conditioned and the bathroom was at the back, and in the morning there was a queue.

A good many of the delegates were school teachers. They shared transport to come to Kuala Lumpur while others came by train or bus.

The hotel was where news-reporters went to interview certain delegates for inside stories.

With the passage of time and the changing of the guard new challenges are posed in view of needs of the hour from the constituents and the populace at large which the party in power has to confront or fulfil.

While others can make promises the party in power is continually judged by what it delivers. The job never ends.

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