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Umno's unfinished business

UMNO has a mountain of tasks to carry out now that the elections for the top party posts have been settled. But to tackle these other issues at hand, the party needs its members to close ranks before the general assembly ends on Saturday. Every delegate and candidate must come to terms with the results of the elections, heed the advice of the president and his deputy, and work together for the King and country. In the words of vanquished Wanita leader Datuk Siti Zaharah Sulaiman before the election results that brought back Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz to the movement's helm on Wednesday, both losers and winners must "shake hands and avoid long faces".

It is very important that the party works to cover the cracks within and allow no further division following this week's general assembly. A whole nation depends on Umno to remain strong and united because a lot depends on the party's effectiveness in leading the Malays and in dealing with the other BN components, a role that has assured this country and its citizens peace and harmony for decades. A weak and divided Umno will result in instability within the Malay community as well as between the Malays and the other races. It must be remembered that Umno, through the BN, has also been the agent of integration between the peninsula and Sabah and Sarawak. If members of Umno lose sight of the importance of their roles in the party and to the people, and choose to occupy themselves instead with petty squabbles and self-interest pursuits, the future of this country cannot remain as bright.

The tasks facing Umno are numerous and hardly easy. In politics, for example, the party must chart out strategies from now to win back the two states that have fallen from BN's hands to the Opposition. On the economic front, recovery from the Asian financial crisis is still fragile and requires the experience and expertise that only Umno, as the major decision- and policy-maker within the BN Government, is able to provide. Socio-economically, there remains much to be done to address the issues of equitable wealth distribution, poverty eradication, education, medical services, and shortage of low-cost houses. Because Umno's agenda is the national agenda, everything that affects the country has to do with the party. Dr Mahathir's discomfort with the impact of globalisation on companies and citizens gives Umno the task of making the people understand and prepare themselves for these threats from outside.

The list of things-to-do for Umno goes on and on. In short, it is not excessive to say that the future of this country hinges on the party's well-being. And going by the remarks made by the president when he opened the assembly yesterday, not all is well. The question of succession in the party leadership, at least, is more or less resolved with the elections. But money politics is still rampant and corruption is a growing tumour that will kill the party from within if not checked quickly. There are Umno leaders who are elected by the people to be their representatives but the only people they are serving are themselves. Once upon a time, people became Umno members to serve the country, race and religion; now there are the greedy ones in the party who would use it as a short-cut to being rich.

Umno needs to trace its roots and the leaders need to bring members back to the basic struggles of the party. Those who are elected to the top posts in the party this week will be leading this mission, which was why

the Prime Minister stressed the importance of ensuring that the general assembly would not vote in corrupt leaders. Now that the candidates have made their choice, they will have to live with that. The party needs to move on but at the same time it owes it to its 2.8 million members and the entire population of the country to weed out all corrupt practices and prosecute corrupt leaders and members. The smallest of hesitation in doing this will put paid to all its efforts in everything else.

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