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Umno unity important for all Malaysians

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THE 54th Umno general assembly is over. The delegates have elected the party leadership which will lead them for the next three years. While the ballots were secret, the views of the delegates were made loud and clear during the debate.

The delegates returned home after three days, having done their duty to the party and having said their piece and articulating their views.

Umno is a Malay party. But its influence is pervasive. The activities of the party - the general assembly, debate, elections and quarrels - are closely watched by Malaysians and foreigners alike.

As the dominant party in the Barisan Nasional (BN), Umno's fortunes and health are important for all Malaysians, irrespective of race, culture and religion. As the future of all Malaysians is tied to Umno, even if they are not, and cannot be, its members, this puts a greater responsibility on the Umno leadership.

With the party elections over, it is time to get down to work to ensure that the country's development agenda and its Vision 2020 are not derailed. The environment has changed dramatically and one needs to adjust to the new environment which may not be as friendly as previously.

Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reminded delegates that they "must learn to live and succeed in a hostile environment".

The environment is hostile in more ways than one. The newly-elected members of the Supreme Council, and indeed all party members, must prepare to face greater challenges and to deal with the changed and "hostile environment".

The elected leaders have a duty not only to their race, their divisions, and their party but also to all Malaysians to ensure that their future and that of future generations is not jeopardised.

Dr Mahathir said he has tried all means - appeal, scolding, persuasion, threats, crying - but nothing has worked. This year, he resorted to prayer. His simple message and wish is to see the party united. Umno party unity is paramount to the nation and its well-being.

United, the 2.8 million members can move the world, if they so desire. Although in much smaller numbers, but fiercely united and with a common purpose and mission, the Malays were able to fight the British in 1946.

Unity and resilience will enable Umno to achieve greater heights which will benefit not only the Malays but all Malaysians and the nation.

Divided, there is the danger of the party weakening. Already, there are splinter parties of those who were formally Umno members.

Lessons from political parties in other countries should be learnt. These include the Kuomintang in Taiwan, the Muslim League in Pakistan and the Congress Party in India.

The Indian Congress Party's division into Congress and Congress I left the original party weakened and disunited. This also made it less effective as the factions were just fractions of the party's former self.

Dr Mahathir told the assembly at the end of the three days that he was going to entrust his deputy Datuk Abdullah Badawi with greater official responsibilities while he himself travelled the length and breadth of the country to foster greater unity among party members.

But the job of ensuring party unity should not be left to the president alone. Other members of the Supreme Council and divisional and branch

leaders, too, have a duty. As they are constantly in touch with the grassroots, it is their duty and responsibility to ensure that party unity is maintained and strengthened.

Undoubtedly, the party has gone through difficult times. But so has the country. It is important that sufficient preparations are made to meet new and greater challenges - both internal and external.

The recent financial crisis and the handling of it proves without a doubt the need for commitment and a sense of purpose. It would have been easier to be just a follower and pawn the country. Foreign funds would have been disbursed to Malaysia at a price. That would have meant the loss of its economic and perhaps even political independence.

Besides, the restructuring of Malaysian society in accordance with the New Economic Policy (NEP) and its successor, the National Development Policy (NDP), would have been undone. Malaysia's progress would have been nullified. It would no longer be independent as its leaders would be dictated to by the creditors.

Today, not only has the country recovered, but its policies have been acknowledged by even its worst critics. More importantly, the homegrown policies have ensured that the fabric of the Malaysian society has remained intact.

Umno members have a greater responsibility to ensure that the achievements and progress of the country and its people, of all races, creed and religion, are not sacrificed by its internal quarrels and divisions.

As members of the dominant and most powerful political party in the country, they have a moral duty to all Malaysians, and not just to the Malay race, to ensure a unified and prosperous Malaysia. A country where Malaysians can walk tall and continue to make their own decisions and be proud to be Malaysians.

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