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Unhappy voters need to be won over

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CHAIRIL Anuar's letter, "Keadilan now finds itself at crucial political crossroad" (NST, May 31) was thought provoking.

He sketched vividly the competing interest of seekers of ideals in Keadilan and the "Anwar faithfuls" and that, they, collectively are tearing the party apart.

At the same time, Umno may not profit from the widely anticipated disintegration of Keadilan. Some of the disenchanting Malay voters need to be won over, still. The speech by Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the closing of the Umno general assembly remains deeply relevant in the Malay schism. Umno will still find itself besieged, as the hostile environment will not disappear just because Keadilan veers out of the screen.

The disaffected Malay voters may actually lack political convictions, as they never had the time to develop their political thinking given the intensity of the rat race.

The fall of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was seized upon as a political fight, neglecting the other important elements in life. Many still have to grow intellectually rather than reduced to being reactionaries and followers.

Unless the entire Umno membership and sympathisers talk to them, reason with them, their jaundiced views of some aspects of Malaysian politics will not go away. You will be surprised at the level of misunderstanding that pervades society. Pump a seemingly credible rumour and it will swiftly grip the nation.

Often forgotten is that the Umno line and what the party stands for will appeal to a broad section of the population as it embodies the wishes of the vast majority.

It is for tolerance, moderation and higher quality of life, among others. It is about having more money for your children's education, for travels and the other good things in life.

Big words associated with vision and farsightedness projected by Umno may need to be explained in clearer, simpler terms.

The Umno "vision" is about sharing of wealth. About rewarding the hardworking classes. About moving ahead with IT. It is about greater productivity and profitability so that employees earn fatter ESOS packages and bonuses.

The nation with Umno as its lynchpin has not done terribly wrong.

A major fight ahead concerns the role of mainstream media. Many out there somehow believe that if they write "critical letters", the newspapers are unlikely to print them.

"We need to be persuaded," one of them told me the other day. Many hold on to a loose or sometimes misleading interpretation of "critical writing". As a regular contributor, I find the newspapers accommodative.

Newspapers have to become a hotbed of national debate. They need to have the brightest professionals, politicians and academics participating. They have to write.

Journalists can write and they will continue to churn out a majority of materials published by newspapers. But at times journalists succumb to simplified argument or what is termed as "journalistic philosophy" in their commentaries, given the obvious time constraint. The experts will have to get to the front and be heard.

