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New attire should have sported party colours

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I STOOD on the carpeted steps of the new Malacca Umno building and watched the proceedings from an elevated position. The afternoon heat was overwhelming as the crowd and dignitaries waited for the arrival of party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

When he arrived, there were shouts of "Hidup Umno, Hidup Melayu" led by a middle-aged man in a red long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. He had appointed himself as chief cheerleader and had the voice to go with it. His followers echoed his words obediently.

He was leading a group of teenagers in red round-necked T-shirts with yellow sleeves. "Rakan Remaja Umno" was written in white on the back of each T-shirt. The T-shirt also carried the names of an Umno division which sponsored these lads with their uniform. The divisions' names were written in capital letters so that no one could mistake the lad for a member of a junior Selangor football team. The Selangor Football Fan Club also has similar outfits, I found out.

But there was another group of young men in the crowd and they clearly outshone the teenagers in their attire. The group comprised young men in their 20s and 30s and were clad in dark blue long-sleeved T-shirts with the words "Gerak Waja" printed on the back. They wore dark blue caps with the Umno emblem in white. This was the first time I had seen an Umno emblem in white as the ones elsewhere were in red.

But what caught my eye were the white gloves these young men sported. Yes, white gloves! Malacca Umno's Gerak Waja team was equipped with white gloves, similar to the ones a hotel doorman normally wears. This was really new and I had not seen Umno members donning them elsewhere.

The gloves made me wonder. Umno's young men don't want to get their hands dirty? Or are the gloves only for decorative purposes - to be kept in the drawer until such time when they are to be taken out, aired and worn. Even then, I still can't figure out the reason for the new attire, one that differs completely from the known attire of Umno's young men.

I then recalled a statement made in Selangor the previous day that a motorcycle group (elsewhere referred to as a gang) was about to be formed in the State. It's the Umno bikers club, or at least that was the impression I got. The gang will have black jeans and T-shirts as their basic attire as they should look sophisticated and trendy, the sponsors were reported to have said.

I'm not questioning the right of these groups to have their own uniform or attire, but I'm a little confused. Umno Youth itself has a different set of attire, black vests used by its "Gerak Gempur" group. I remember seeing Umno's young men doing their rounds in this attire during the last general election. I haven't seen them of late, but I'm sure they must have sent them to the dhoby shop.

What's in a shirt anyway, you might ask? Well, nothing much really. But at a time when the party is anxious to project a common image, I don't see this being done, judging from the attire put on display in the past week or so. One might argue that one shouldn't make an issue out of such things. In fact, one might even ask - why create a fuss about this?

The sponsors of the attire could perhaps have given some thought to their uniformity before parading them. They should at least maintain the party colours. Umno Youth members are known to use a white shirt and dark-coloured pants, while Wanita members are often seen in red sarong and

white baju kurung. These are the colours which distinguish them from everyone else and everyone is familiar with them.

The Umno headquarters must give some thought to this. No one can stop party leaders from being creative, but when creativity takes them to a different path, then I would question their seriousness in wanting to project common dreams and aspirations. If no one checks this, one Umno division will sport different colours, or choose colours according to the fancy of individual leaders.

Is it possible that one day, one Umno division will have green as its preferred colour, perhaps in yet another attempt to confuse the enemy?

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