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Umno-Anniversary

UMNO'S 57TH ANNIVERSARY REMINDS MEMBERS OF STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

By: Harlina Samson

KUALA LUMPUR, May 9 (Bernama) -- Umno's 57th anniversary celebration at the Merdeka Stadium on Sunday will be most meaningful and symbolic in reminding the people of its struggles to unite the Malays and free the country from its colonial masters.

The anniversary celebration of the United Malay National Organisation (Umno), which was formed on May 11, 1956, this time clearly brings back the nostalgic moment when Umno's second president Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj loudly proclaimed "Merdeka" (Freedom) on Aug 31, 1957 at the stadium.

Umno's 57th anniversary is symbolic because it also coincides with the year 1957, when the country attained independence, and acts as a reminder to its members and supporters that despite the party's mature age, it does not mean that Umno will not collapse and continue to champion the cause of the people and remain in power.

When the world is being plagued by various problems and uncertainties, terrorism, oppression of the weak by powerful nations, and mass killings, the challenges faced by Malaysia, particularly the Malays, are even greater.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will step down from government and party posts in October, had warned at the Umno general assembly last year that the Malays in Malaysia are still not safe.

"The Malays are still weak and are the poorest race in the country. If the Malays are not careful, they may find themselves going back to the time when they were colonised, poor and humiliated," said the prime minister when delivering his policy speech.

Just look at what happened to Iraq. The invasion by the United States and its allies recently showed how a weak nation must take whatever fate that befalls them.

The Iraqi civilisation, the land of the prophets, which had been defended for thousands of years had been destroyed so easily in the name of democracy.

Appropriately themed "The Struggles of a Nation", the anniversary celebration this time also aims to remind the younger generation of the struggles and sacrifices of their elders in freeing the country from the colonialists and developing it into an independent and successful nation.

Umno executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor said the theme was chosen because it was closely linked to Umno's struggles all this while in producing a competitive and progressive Malay and Malaysian race.

Umno's success in moulding a competitive race cannot be denied. Without Umno, there might not have been the Permodalan Nasional Berhad or the various unit trusts and government-owned agencies specifically for the Malays today. Many Malays also had the opportunity to venture into business and became prosperous.

Nevertheless, are these successes by Umno all this while sufficient to turn it into a public institution liked by every strata of the society particularly the young generation?

A Malay professional, who teaches at an institution of higher learning specifically for the Bumiputeras, said that after having achieved maturity, Umno should indulge in soul searching to ensure that the party remains relevant to the changing environment.

The anniversary celebration, to be held before the Umno general

assembly on June 17 to 20, is seen as most significant in the party's history with the transition of power from Dr Mahathir, who has led Umno for more than two decades, to his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Dr Mahathir will deliver his keynote address in front of about 40,000 party members and supporters who will be attending the celebration.

Certainly, the people will be looking forward anxiously to the speech as it will be one of several major speeches by the statesman who is most respected, even at the international level, before he retires.

Umno and the Malays are truly indebted to Dr Mahathir who has emerged as a national hero and a highly respected Islamic leader.

His leadership has made it possible for Malaysia to achieve excellence in terms of racial solidarity, education, economy and finance. Dr Mahathir has also put in place a strong foundation for the country to attain its aspiration of becoming a developed nation by the year 2020.

The party's anniversary celebration and general assembly this time are also more significant in preparing the almost three million Umno members to face the 11th general election which can be called for at any time now, under a new leadership.

-- BERNAMA

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