

For Umno, three routes to 1Goal
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As Umno gears up for the 13th general election, dubbed its most important ever, its three key leaders delivered divergent policy speeches, all aimed at pumping up the grassroots ahead of the polls.

While the party president Najib Abdul Razak (left) took on a more moderate and conciliatory tone, his deputy Muhyiddin Yassin's opening address for the party's three wings was a classic Ketuanan Melayu fear-mongering affair, with all guns blazing, but the barrels were mostly pointed at the Chinese.

The Youth wing chief Khairy Jamaluddin took on a more intellectual approach, urging young party members to be progressive and liberal, a call that observers believe will find little resonance among the delegates.

At this point, Umno appears to be casting a wide net without deviating from its pro-Malay roots, and yet prepared to transform itself, an idea Najib has been trying to sell to the party since taking over the helm in 2009.

But it was Muhyiddin who set the tone for subsequent debate speakers on Tuesday night, with his vitriolic speech, beating the drum of Malay unity in face of "growing Chinese and Christian threats".

His address called for a jihad for the sake of Islam, Malays and Malaysia, while painting the Chinese-dominated DAP as the main enemy of Umno.

"The 13th general election is going to be the mother of all elections as it will determine whether the Malays will fall or rise.

"Will the political power remain in our hands or will it pass to others?" Muhyiddin asked, equating Umno's survival to the survival of all Malays in the country.

Race still rides high in PM's lexicon

By the time Najib took the stage with his policy speech, there had already been rounds of race-based debates echoing Muhyiddin's views on DAP's alleged agenda to subvert the Malays.

Najib's emphasis was on the need to transform Umno, warning that this was necessary in view of how old regimes in the Middle East were being wiped out, one by one.

He said that Umno must accept that there is now a new political landscape and tragedy would befall the party should there be no changes.

Najib then went on to urge members to engage with voters through the new media and adopt a new political thinking, which he did not elaborate on.

However, there was no hint of transformation where Najib's view on Umno's role among the Malays was concerned, but he did provide a dollop of his own wisdom on how the Malays were under seige.

"If Umno loses power, who will defend the position of Islam? Who is capable of defending the rights of the Muslims and the agenda of the Malays? Who can continue to honour our Malay rulers?

"Ask yourself the question," he told the delegates.

Shahrizat diverted to self-defence

Although racial posturing was once the mainstay of Umno Youth's AGM, its leader Khairy instead called on members to provide "solutions-driven politics" and drop what he called a "Cold War" mentality.

Other progressive terms to crop up in Khairy's speech included "civil liberties", and claiming that the movement's commitment towards such ideals had led to the amendment of several repressive laws.

As for the embattled Wanita leader Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, she turned the Wanita AGM into a platform to fight for her own political survival, brought about by her embroilment in the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) scandal.

Shahrizat's fiery rhetoric managed to secure the support of the Wanita movement against the allegations targeted at her and her husband, but she answered none of the allegations against her, including whether she was a party to the cabinet's decision to approve the NFC project.

Nonetheless, regardless of their targeted audience or ideologies, the speeches of all four leaders exposed a sense of desperation, born out of the fear that the BN may lose its 54-year stranglehold on power.

In one way or another, all of them stressed that the next general election would be a do-or-die battle for Umno, and that party members unity was of supreme importance to ensure victory.

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