



Umno AGM: Will 1Malaysia or race rhetoric prevail?
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's 1Malaysia concept has been a tough sell among Malaysians, and most observers believe it is even harder to swallow for Umno - the 3.6 million strong party that Najib leads.

Some Umno rank-and-file have opined that 1Malaysia dilutes the party's *raison d'etre* - championing the Malay agenda - and puts them in the unfamiliar territory of speaking as national, instead of communal, leaders.

During the Umno annual general assembly last year, some delegates privately voiced their disapproval of big 1Malaysia logos all over the meeting venue or having the party flag fashioned in the style of 1Malaysia logos.

This time round, muted objections or otherwise, not only will 1Malaysia logos or Umno flags shaped into a '1' make an appearance, but the '1BN' logo will be making its debut as well.

Observers are now keen to see whether assembly delegates will follow the party headquarter's cue and bring the 1Malaysia concept to the fore, instead of the usual *ketuanan Melayu* rhetoric.

Gearing up for polls

Grumbles over the ambiguous 1Malaysia concept has been relatively quiet, save for some stinging criticism by former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad, but Najib believes that the 1Malaysia concept is critical to his plans for the next general election.

The delegates are also expected to touch on various government grand plans, particularly the New Economic Model, that has called for the gradual removal of affirmative action policies.

Though the NEM is supported by liberal elements within Umno because they believe this will encourage competitiveness, history has shown that the majority of Umno stalwarts will balk at the slightest hint of touching affirmative action.



In the shorter term, delegates and party leaders are expected to go on a chest-beating fest to boost morale ahead of the Galas and Batu Sapi by-elections, that will be held simultaneously on Nov 4.

Though both by-elections are not particularly crucial, winning Galas would serve as a starting point for the Umno's attempt to wrest Kelantan from PAS that has been in power since 1990.

Will Khairy survive?

For the Umno Youth assembly, delegates are expected to table their respective 'report cards' on the performance of its unconventional leader Khairy Jamaluddin.



Khairy (*right*), who was elected as Umno Youth chief in March last year, has been a fervent champion of 1Malaysia and has moved away from the communal hard-line approach of his predecessors.

During the assembly last year, Khairy in a bold speech urged his brethren to put aside the traditional 'Malay dominance' mentality and embrace the idea of 'Malay leadership'.

He said this would help the movement to forge closer ties with other communities and build stronger relationships with their component party counterparts.

The Umno general assembly begins tonight with the officiating speech of the Umno Wanita, Youth and Puteri wings by Deputy Prime Minister and Umno deputy president Muhyiddin Yassin.

The three wings will debate their respective leaders' opening speeches tomorrow.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak will be making his presidential address on Thursday. Debates on his speech will follow, until Saturday when the assembly comes to a close.

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