

Umno extends olive branch to non-Malays
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ANALYSIS Many political insiders have always said that while the Umno president has to maintain a Zen-like poise of a statesman, his deputy can afford to be the radical alter ego of the party.

In fact, the seemingly different stands that the two take would imply a deepening rift between prime minister Najib Razak and DPM Muhyiddin Yassin.

Despite the chasm, both certainly came together at the Umno general assembly this week in an effort to put a band-aid on deteriorating race relations.

Muhyiddin went first with his speech during the opening ceremony of the Wanita, Youth and Puteri wings on Tuesday night, calling for a stop to the racial rhetoric and battle cries - a usual staple in previous gatherings.

Najib went next; in his policy speech on Thursday insisted for the racial discussions to stop, calling it "pointless" since Malay rights have been preserved and enshrined in the federal constitution.

"The position of Malays and bumiputeras and the interests of other communities are embedded in the constitution. Thus, any such polemics on these are now academic," he had said.

And they are aiming the message not just to the 2,500-odd party delegates, representing close to 3.5 million recorded members in Malaysia's oldest political party.

Message for all

"It is not the matter of delegates in the Umno assembly alone. The message is very loud and clear - it is to the whole Malaysian citizens," said Kuala Terengganu division chief Wan Ahmad Farid Wan Salleh.

If that were indeed the case, then efforts to halt the racial debate would also have to come from Umno, whose speakers have previously courted a whirlwind of controversy when their racially-heated debates were televised in 2005.

But how do you stop racial discussions when Umno is a race-based party professed to be fighting for the Malay struggle, the founding principle of the party?

Even at this assembly, despite touching on various issues, almost all of the speakers in the general assembly including those in the wings had spoken on the need to defend Malay rights, some with more vigour than others.

Wan Ahmad Farid's excuse is that the delegates are merely reacting to a string of cumulative incidences over the past year.

"We are simply reminding. If people start questioning what is already in the constitution, are we not allowed to remind?" he said.

But to what end, with all this "reactions" and "reminders"?

'Time for truce'

"There'd be no end to it. And that is why the prime minister is calling for truce. He wants a cooling-off period. We've been trying to do that for months but no one listens.

"Why don't we leave whatever is in the constitution, leave it as that and everyone's happy," he said.

Umno supreme council member Ismail Sabri Yaakob also said that the change must come from Umno to set the example for the rest of the country.

"There are still Malays who think that they have made a big sacrifice when the non-Malays are given automatic citizenship upon Independence.

"They ask me 'why don't we be like Dubai, let the non-Arabs be rich but just give them Pakatan Rakyat and then they won't want voting rights'. But it has been agreed by our forefathers and there should be no more question about it.

"The same goes for the Malay special privileges as well. It has been agreed upon, so stop harping on it and let's move forward," he said.

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