

Umno delegates: Think of country, not your wallets
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 25, 09
Ivanpal S Grewal

Never before in the history of Umno and Malaysia, has a party election been as momentous and pivotal as the contest Umno will see tomorrow and the day after.

The postponement of the Umno general assembly-to accommodate the transition plan-has produced ambivalent results because the prolonged campaign period has resulted in greater animosity between the candidates and also aggravated the problem of money politics.

However, it has also allowed for a peaceful transition of power albeit not under the circumstances most would have wished.

My appeal to the delegates of this current Umno general assembly is simple: elect with your hands on your heart and not with your hands in your pocket. All of you have tremendous power and influence to shape the course and destiny of our nation. You have with you the power to decide the leadership that will take either take Malaysia forward or backwards.

It does not stop there; you also have the responsibility to ensure that the leaders you elect are clean, effective, incorruptible and committed to a multiracial Malaysia. Despite being a Malay party and the fact that the president of Umno is also the prime minister of Malaysia, you need to have due concern for the sentiments of non-Umno members.

I can only hope and pray that each of you will make the right decision, and give Najib Abdul Razak a team that he can work with and also a team that will espouse the highest ethical standards and are committed to the multiracial agenda.

Umno must remember that Malaysians can no longer tolerate the excesses, the abuse of power and the corruption which is now synonymous with Umno. The sycophantic ways of delegates and members have also galvanised the patronage system in Umno and further enhanced the arrogance of Umno leaders.

The inability to be honest with Malaysians and to respect the truth has thrown Umno in the vortex it finds itself in now. Umno and its members must always remember the words of George Orwell: 'During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.'

We do find ourselves in such trying times and Umno and BN must now mobilise the forces of truth and justice and immediately cease the continued suppression of freedom and human rights.

Again, Orwell reminds us all: 'All political thinking for years past has been vitiated in the same way. People can foresee the future only when it coincides with their own wishes, and the most grossly obvious facts can be ignored when they are unwelcome.'

Umno must take heed of this message. Umno can no longer ignore the cries for change and the hopes for a better Malaysia. Umno must understand that they can no longer ignore the thirst for a better and more equitable Malaysia.

A more equitable Malaysia will ensure that development is brought to the many rural villages still without running water or electricity (yes, they do exist in Malaysia). A fairer Malaysia will ensure that the poor regardless of race will not be deprived of the opportunities that will encourage them to scale the ladder of social mobility.

A more honest Malaysia will ensure that law-enforcement does not selectively prosecute people or abuse detainees until they meet their Maker. A more just Malaysia will ensure that the class struggle does

not end with the poor and the less fortunate losing. A more open Malaysia will ensure that justice is not traded and lawyers do not decide how judges should rule. A more trustworthy Malaysia will encourage foreign participation and spur economic growth.

If Umno and its members continue to be caught and trapped by the old politics of division, corruption and the abuse of power, then they will continue to lose support. The inevitable will be a journey to oblivion and rejection by the masses.

Umno must be contrite over its failings and take earnest action to deal with the grievances of the people. Malaysians are not unreasonable; I as a Malaysian only want to see truth and justice prevail at all costs.

People who say that Malaysia is not ready for change are frolicking on the wrong side of history. Again and again, we have tirelessly quoted examples of free people who have without anything except courage and determination, prevailed against the mighty forces of oppression and injustice. In all situations from Rome to America to Europe and today Malaysia, the forces of honesty have always prevailed and will continue to prevail.

Umno must understand that the power of the truth is mightier than any form of suppression that they can employ; by banning newspapers and websites they only seek transient calm while losing the larger battle of perception.

If governance was so simple, then every despotic regime would have survived. Even Robert Mugabe had to accept that tyranny had its limits. I am not saying that the BN is despotic, however I wish for us to do everything we can to ensure they are not.

Najib Abdul Razak will likely be our next prime minister. Unlike his predecessors, he will not have a honeymoon period neither is he coming to office with popular support. He helms a coalition that is weakening and a party that is at war with itself. However, in all this turmoil, he has a unique opportunity to remake Umno, BN and Malaysia for the better or for the worst; that it is indeed his choice.

The true test for Najib and his new team is to harness the aspirations of all Malaysians. He has to work to regain the confidence of a people short-changed continuously so much so they now believe that the path to the promised land is via the ultimate rejection of Umno and BN.

The destiny with a cleaner and more efficient government has already come. Malaysians from four states now have interacted with the alternatives and anecdotal evidence suggests that they prefer the alternative which means doom for BN.

In the end, the true measure of a man is not how he performs in time of comfort and convenience but how he tackles intractable problems. Najib has the unique chance to remake Malaysia. However the question is: will he cease the day?

Like Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Najib has spoken the language of moderation, equity and reform; but he fails to understand that Malaysians have heard all of it before and will not be swayed by catchy phrases or lofty promises.

It is better he act first and only then should he pronounce his action. That will restore some credibility to the BN. Governance - despite what we have been told - is indeed quite simple. All you have to do is to take the right action and act within the ambit of the law.

Governments indeed falter and fail because they abandon the path of righteousness and embrace the road to riches.

I can only wish him the best of luck and remind him that the reservoir of support and tolerance for the antics of the BN no longer exists. He must act with fervour and justness; only then will Malaysians be ready to give the BN a second chance.

Like most Malaysians, the writer's faith is constantly tested, but like all Malaysians' yearning for change, he has yet to lose faith.

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