

Umno luminaries back call for reforms
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Umno luminaries have endorsed their new leader's vision and urged the faction-riven party to give Najib Abdul Razak their full support.

"He was quite blunt in his speech. If we don't change to accommodate the people we will be booted out in the next general election," said Mukhriz Mahathir, the son of former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

umno youth 2009 agm 250309 mukhriz "We need to rebrand the party to show it is caring, it cannot be just cosmetic changes," said Mukhriz, who is running for the influential post of Youth wing chief.

One of Najib's most radical suggestions was to reform the way Umno chooses its leaders, dumping a delegate system that has bred a system of endemic vote-buying or "money politics".

"The greed to chase for posts and power has created a new culture," Wanita leader Rafidah Aziz told delegates in a speech.

"It is accurate to say there is now an approach of 'auction for positions', with the possibility of those who are willing to offer more to be voted for a post."

umno 59 agm 2009 wanita puteri youth opening 250309 04 Najib, who is to replace Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, told Umno yesterday that it faced oblivion unless it transformed its reputation of being corrupt and out of touch with voters.

"What is at stake is nothing less than the very fate of Umno," Najib said in a speech last night at the joint assembly of the party's Wanita, Youth and Puteri wings.

"If we do not heed this message, their seething anger will become hatred and in the end this may cause them to abandon us altogether," he said of people who are abandoning the party, which has ruled for half a century.

Najib, the 55-year-old current deputy premier, will shortly succeed premier Abdullah, who disappointed voters with his failure to introduce promised reforms including tackling graft.

Huge task ahead for Najib

Najib faces a huge task in pushing through reforms.

He comes to power burdened with heavy political baggage, including low public support and lingering questions over corruption and a sensational murder case.

umno 59 agm 2009 puteri youth wanita mt campaign 250309 08 He has been forced to repeatedly deny any involvement in the 2006 killing of Mongolian woman Altantuya Shaariibuu, the lover of one of his close aides, but the case continues to captivate Malaysians.

Ramon Navaratnam, former president of Transparency International, said he was "greatly encouraged" by the targeting of corruption but that Najib now faces scrutiny over whether he can really overhaul the party.

"Najib's speech came out strongly and boldly, and expectations have risen as to what he stands for and what he will do. So the proof of the pudding is in the eating," he said.

"If he cannot deliver, then it might become counterproductive," he said, referring to the disappointment triggered by Abdullah's lack of action.

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