

Umno 'intoxicated' with success
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Outgoing Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi issued a damning indictment of the ruling party, saying it was contaminated by greed, complacency and internal rivalries.

In his last speech before handing over the reins, Abdullah lamented the decay that has set in after a half-century in power.

"We were intoxicated by our own achievements and we became complacent. We believed that we had become all-powerful. We have put our own positions within the party first," he told delegates attending the 59th Umno annual general assembly in Kuala Lumpur.

Abdullah said the March 8 polls, which handed the opposition control of a third of parliamentary seats in an unprecedented result that effectively ended his career, was a sign that "Umno's glory has dimmed."

"Materialism has seeped into the party, making a number of party members greedy and avaricious," said Abdullah, in what some consider as his best speech in his long public career.

"The path that we choose will determine whether we continue to remain relevant or whether we are reduced to a forgotten footnote in the pages of history," he added.

'Change ourselves to change Umno'

Abdullah said members must heed the alarm bells that have rung so loudly, prompting questions such as 'what went wrong?' and 'why and how did we go wrong?'

He said the current situation requires Umno to be introspective, revisit the basis of the party's struggle and examine the weaknesses and recent missteps.

Calling on Umno to come to its senses, Abdullah said many believe that if Umno and Barisan Nasional do not change, then the March 8 general election will be the last time BN forms government.

pak lah final speech as umno president 2009 260309 01"After this (if we do not change), the people outside this hall will not vote for us again. Many have voiced the view that 'Umno needs to change'.

"But what I hope to hear is for you to say 'I will change' and that we have the courage to follow up those words with actions.

"It would be a grave travesty if we do not understand that we are Umno and as long as we do not change, Umno will not change," he added.

For Umno to remain relevant, Abdullah, said the party has to fuse its past strengths with new elements necessary for survival and success.

pak lah arriving at umno 2009 agm 260309 04"Let us revive our willingness to sacrifice, strengthen our dedication, adhere to moderation and be governed by our humanity.

"Rid ourselves of our arrogance and conceit that we are the only ones who are right, that we are the only ones who know all.

"Distance ourselves from corruption. Let us be equal in our concern for all, be they Malays or non-Malays, party members or those who support our opponents," he added.

'Favourite whipping boy'

Abdullah warned that Umno was facing a life and death situation, and its fate hinged on the attitude of its members and leaders.

"Today everything that Umno does is seen as wrong, everything that Umno says is believed to be untrue.

"Indeed Umno, as well as BN, have become everyone's favourite whipping boy, labelled as the cause of every defect and discordance, and blamed as the perpetrator of immoral behaviour and misconduct even when such actions are committed by those who are members of political parties opposed to Umno," he said.

The outgoing president also outlined several measures which could help revive the party and check its decline.

"Perhaps the time has come for us to introduce regulations and procedures that will enable the party to be administered in a more disciplined and controlled manner," he said.

Among others he suggested limiting the number of terms for those holding office and giving every member a right to vote, which will also help eradicate money politics.

Abdullah also said that Umno should not turn its back on its responsibility towards safeguarding the position of the Malays and bumiputeras but at the same time steer clear of a racist mindset.

"Umno must never adopt racial and religious positions that are extremist. Umno must never practice discrimination to the extent that non-Malays view it as a racist party," he added.

'We are not garbage bins'

The prime minister also took a swipe at the opposition, saying they behave as if having a full license to commit anything, free to utter the foulest words.

"I am not saying that all Umno members are blameless or without weaknesses. But certainly, Umno members should not be treated as garbage bins, merely to collect blame and slander.

"It is not reasonable to believe that members and supporters of the opposition parties are free from sins or flaws. Certainly they cannot all be saints," he added.

He said recently, the Malays have begun to feel threatened by demands which are seen to be extreme and unreasonable by non-Malays upholding the 'Malaysian Malaysia' slogan that is vocally championed by the opposition alliance.

"There are those among the leaders of the opposition alliance who have ridiculed the sovereignty of the Malay rulers in an ill-mannered and uncouth fashion, openly insulted the Malays and heaped vulgar and crude abuse on Malay organisations," he added.

At the same time, Abdullah noted that non-Malays - including those in BN - feel compelled to speak out more stridently, feeling themselves marginalised and sidelined as a result of slippage in the implementation of certain government policies.

"Both parties are making their concerns heard, both parties are harbouring mistrust and doubt. If we allow this state of affairs to continue, it will certainly erode the spirit of cooperation and destroy the unity that we have built more than 50 years ago," he added.

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