

**Umno on road to reform, vows Najib**  
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In his first policy speech as Umno president, Najib Abdul Razak said that Umno aimed to reform itself into a "progressive, dynamic and responsive" party.

He told 2,541 delegates that the party must change if it wants to retain its unbroken grip on power since Independence after the next general election.

"For us to survive, Umno has no choice but to face the reality that it must reform," he said.

He told his party that it must be seen as safeguarding the interest of all races, not just Malays who make up 60 percent of the population and have dominated politics since Merdeka in 1957.

"Umno's relevance as a ruling party depends on how much it is able to capture the imagination of the Malays, but most importantly all Malaysians," he said. "Umno cannot be regarded as a party that only champions a small group."

Also present at the Dewan Merdeka of the Putra World Trade Centre where the general assembly is being held, was former president Dr Mahathir Mohamad. However, immediate past president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was not at the function.

Najib, who is also prime minister, took over the party six months ago from the then Umno chief Abdullah in wake of the unprecedented setback at the 2008 general election.

The party president reminded the delegates that the Malay nationalist party will remain a "centrist" party. "We are neither a leftist nor a right-wing party," he said.

"Since its formation 60 years ago, Umno has accommodated the left, right, nationalists and religious scholars."

**Malays not racists**

In his 70-minute speech titled "Uphold tradition, and fostering change", Najib stressed that Umno is a party which championed the welfare of the people.

"Umno must not be seen as representing certain people. Instead, the party must be seen as an inclusive party which put the peoples' interests at the forefront, and not oneself".

He also slammed the opposition for branding Umno a racist party.

"If it is true Malays are racist as alleged, we would not accommodate other ethnic groups such as vernacular schools, and it would not be possible for Umno to work with other races and component party members."

Among the leaders of BN component parties present at the opening of the general assembly were MIC president S Samy Vellu, Gerakan president Dr Koh Tsu Koon and PPP president M Kayveas.

Conspicuously absent was embattled MCA president Ong Tee Keat.

To kick off the reform process, party delegates will have a closed-door debate later today on

seven amendments to the Umno constitution.

The seven motions include one to increase the voting base to elect leaders to the division level whereby 146,500 members will be eligible to vote as compared to only 2,510 delegates now.

Najib boosted that there were no political parties in Malaysia which is brave enough to make major constitutional amendments as what Umno is doing.

"From 2,500 delegates electing their leaders, we are expanding the base to 146,500. This is a sign that democracy is alive and well in Umno," said Najib.

"There are not many parties in Malaysia which are brave to make such drastic changes. All party members must remember that following the amendments, all of you must move away from the negative culture of money politics so we would become a clean and respected party."

### **We shall overcome**

Najib said following BN's heavy losses in last year's general election, the opposition had predicted the demise of Umno.

He said many people had wanted to "mentalqinkan" (say final prayers) on Umno .

"They say Umno is buying extra time before it dies. This is not the first time that they have made such a prediction.

"When a group of members split from Umno to form PAS, such premonition was made and similarly after the May 13, 1969 racial riots or the 1988 Umno elections, which led to the formation of Parti Semangat 46, or the 1999 elections."

He said Malaysians had sent a strong message to Umno at the 2008 general election. However, Najib vouched that Umno would rise again.

"Alhamdulillah, Umno has managed to surpass all those challenges and we have managed to rise and become stronger. Umno was formed with the ulama, educationists, farmers, fishermen and traders."

"If we remain united, work towards our common goal and put in the effort, we will climb the highest mountain and go down the deepest ravine and swim the deepest ocean. We shall overcome the odds," he said.

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