

**Debates expected to focus on Umno's political survival**  
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PETALING JAYA - An election mood will certainly prevail at the 61st Umno General Assembly in view of the double by-elections in Galas and Batu Sapi.

Barisan Nasional, which had suffered a string of defeats in recent by-elections, must wrest control of Galas and defend Batu Sapi to boost its morale and set the momentum for the next general election.

Apart from concerns over Umno's political survival, debates on 1Malaysia will also take centre-stage.

And the two-day international forum on "The Creation of Global Citizen: Media Liberalisation and New Political Realities" that started Monday in the run up to the assembly, is timely.

The forum provided the right platform for Umno to take heed of the experiences and colossal mistakes made by other great parties around the world, including the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan that lost its grip on power after 50 years despite instituting reform.

The forum attracted 63 participants representing 22 parties from 20 countries including China, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Timor-Leste.

"We must heed the lessons learnt from political turmoil in other countries," said Umno secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor.

Fears that Malay rights would be eroded under the 1Malaysia concept is unfounded, said Tengku Adnan.

"1Malaysia is also about providing a level-playing field for the poor, regardless of race."

Basically, he said, the thrust of the debates should be based on the inclusive new political model promoted by party president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Najib, when launching an Umno Club for retired senior government officers last week, said the new political model was needed as the politics of development strategy was no longer effective.

Tengku Adnan also said there was a serious need to check abuses by the alternative media which were fanning public sentiment for narrow political agenda.

There has been talk that the recent spats between several Umno leaders including Tengku Adnan and Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin with Perkasa would also be raised, but the secretary-general said nothing heated was expected.

About 5,000 delegates and observers are expected to attend the five-day assembly starting today. It will start with a closed-door briefing where Najib is expected to present his aspirations to supreme council members, the delegates as well as division and wing leaders at 3pm.

Later at 8pm, deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin will simultaneously open the Wanita, Youth and Puteri assemblies, which will be held concurrently tomorrow.

Najib will open the general assembly on Thursday morning where three motions on the presidential address, economy and religion and education would be tabled. - *The Star*

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