

More open and inclusive Umno in the offing?

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NEWS ANALYSIS KUALA LUMPUR - The 2010 Umno General Assembly, to be officiated by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is likely to see a new political culture in Umno that is more open and inclusive.

A year after the Umno Constitution was amended, this assembly of 4,907 delegates will likely be filled with changes in terms of culture for the deliberation of all party members.

Furthermore, the keynote addresses of the Wanita, Puteri Umno and Umno Youth chiefs during their own general assemblies today had stressed on challenges and transformations that party members need to undergo.

Although this might be time consuming, Umno needs to move towards a new political model envisioned by Najib as Umno president to ensure Umno's continuity as the country's leading political party.

Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin in his keynote address during the movement's general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here had said that after 64 years, Umno's struggles could no longer be about clashes of power, but also of mental competition and a battle of ideas.

He said a political transformation needed to be implemented immediately to ensure Umno was accepted by party members and the Malaysian people.

Khairy said among the transformations required by Umno members were politics based on thinking and ideas, as well as a political arena which encouraged mental competition and a battle of ideas.

He said parties which challenged Umno's political ideologies needed to be confronted on a political stage holding firmly to knowledge so that "we can defeat them with our strong debate and sharp intellect, not necessarily on executive power only."

As a mass movement, Umno also needs to see that the party has a large following with youths at the grassroots level because political consideration among the younger generation is critical.

Umno leaders and members need to devise effective approaches to attract youths to support Umno and the Barisan Nasional (BN), especially for the next general election.

This is because about three million, or 80 per cent, of new voters for the next general election will consists of young voters.

The percentage of young voters is also projected to increase to 49 per cent in next general election as compared to 41 per cent previously.

Umno also needs to change in line with the explosion of information technology, with focus on social websites such as Facebook and Twitter as an alternative to the traditional mass

media in channeling information to youths.

Therefore, efforts to get closer to the younger generation must use approaches that are based on more critical thinking and views compared to past eras with no room for one-sided propaganda.

Umno Vice-President Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal's proposal should also be regarded seriously by Umno members because as the main component party of the BN, Umno needs to fight for the hearts of all voters regardless of race and religion.

The need for a change in mindsets was also touched on by Puteri chief Datuk Rosnah Abdul Rashid Shirlin in her keynote address, where she asked for the movement to become trendsetters and not followers so that the wings struggle would be accepted by youths. -
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