

Umno -- yesterday. today and tomorrow
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COMMENT The presidential speech by Umno president Najib Razak at the opening of the party general assembly has a considerable focus on racial relations, Malay rights, and the so-called social contract. Najib had stressed on the all-inclusive 1Malaysia concept and at the same time, tried to appease the Malay community.

The prime minister pointed out that it is a moral responsibility for Umno leaders to manage racial relations fairly.

Najib also stressed that the privileges of Malays are already stated in the Federal Constitution which no amendment shall be made to it. He also warned of the consequences of questioning the social contract.

His first message is: Although Umno fights for Malays, it still has a responsibility to other races. The second message is: Do not stir up sensitive issues, Malays must be more confident, and should strengthen cooperation with other racial groups.

It is Najib's response to many recent racial issues. He has declared his "open, tolerate and democratic" stand.

Why is the inter-race relationship still unstable and unresolved even after 53 years of independence? As the backbone of the BN government, Umno has the responsibility to find solutions to the problem. The BN convention scheduled for November should also include the matter in its agenda.

The country is still trapped in racial controversies, despite the federal government trying to make efforts to promote an inclusive New Economic Model (NEM). Today, the country needs a general direction and a consensus of all racial groups, instead of being kept wallowing in the mire of non-productive disputes.

Just like looking at the sky from the bottom of a well, how are we going to enter the beautiful world outside if we do not hop out of the small circle?

As Najib said, disputes over issues like civil rights and Malay privileges are academic debates. Instead of fighting against the shadow, it is better to get rid of these psychological burdens and deal with more important issues.

The Umno general assembly should be more inclusive in its discussion and deliberation, instead of focusing only on Malay privileges and history. How the Malays should adapt themselves to the economic transformation and the goal of becoming a high-income economy should be included in its debates.

From the long Mahathir administration to the short Abdullah era, the competitiveness of Malays has always been an issue of concern and it still remains unsettled today. Under the affirmative action policy that emphasises on the performance-based system, Umno members should try to be independent. The international economy might change at any time and thus, it is impossible for the country to provide subsidies and implement the affirmative action policy forever. The Age of Globalisation is a self-dependent competitive era.

Regardless of whether it is the Government Transformation Plan (GTP) or the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), or even the New Political Model which is more liberal and democratic, Umno's ability to respond well will be tested. Umno must be transformed to lead national politics into a new mode.

Umno has proven its capability along the way of national independence and development. However, the era of glorious history is over and the fate of Umno lies in the challenging future.

Najib has vowed to defend the Putrajaya establishment, with the support of cooperation of the party's 3.57 million members.

Do Umno members understand the people's demands? Will they be able to meet the expectations of the people? Time is running out, Umno must act fast to defend and retain the party prestige. - *mysin Chew.com*

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