

UMNO General Assembly: Beating The Drums For Another May 13
06 December 2011
by Dr Lim Teck Ghee - CPI

The UMNO General Assembly has come and gone. Most political observers had expected it to be the usual rah-rah event aimed at rallying UMNO members ahead of the coming elections and in support of the leadership of Najib Razak, the party president. They were right. The public were subject to yet another spectacle of sound and fury on how important the party is to the future of Malays, albeit with the occasional reminder of how indispensable the party is to the well being of all the citizens of the country.

Optimistic observers who had hoped that the party would live up to its rhetoric of being a mature and transformed party of moderation – at least for the duration of this publicly viewed occasion – were disappointed. The collective breast beating led by the party president and deputy president – on the greatness and goodness of the party compared with the weaknesses and evilness of the opposition – was quite unprecedented in the history of the party's general assemblies.

The attacks against PAS, PKR and especially the DAP during the meeting have only just begun. Can we expect it to continue with greater viciousness and spitefulness as UMNO leaders fan out into the grassroots to campaign in the next few months leading to the elections? What should be of concern is not just the running down and bad mouthing of the opposition. This has been the norm in past assemblies, especially those leading up to the elections. What is new and unexpected is the vitriol and venom directed openly and without inhibition at opposition parties and their leaders.

In many speeches made at the assembly, there appears a concerted attempt at inciting racial and religious emotions and issues and exploiting Malay insecurities with imagined and wildly exaggerated threats of the looming new dawn of non-Malay and Christian dominance for Malaysia should the party fail to win the coming elections. The many socio-economic and political challenges facing the community and nation - many arising from bad governance, abuse of power, and corrupt practices practiced or condoned by the party and its coalition partners during the decades of Barisan rule - received little mention or attention.

UMNO's Ultimate Game Changer

The question which arises now is whether the party is laying the ground work – deliberately or inadvertently – for the game-changing political development sought after by hard line UMNO leaders in case the coming election results do not go UMNO's way. This game changer is a repetition of the 1969 May 13 racial riots.

In his opening address to the assembly, it is notable that amongst the developments listed by the Prime Minister, Najib Razak as influencing the party he referred to the 1969 racial riots as one of the party's eleven game changers in its past and current history. What is regrettable is the way in which he appears to condone the racial violence that resulted in authoritarian rule and the suspension of Parliament, and pins the blame for this darkest event in our history squarely on the

opposition.

"Let us never be negligent because there are some among the opposition leaders who are stoking flames and slogans to belittle the Malays so that there will be a 13th May".

The PM as the responsible leader of our nation must clarify this statement and allay the anxieties and fears of our citizenry and voters on the possible recurrence of racial violence. He and his Deputy President must never give the impression to Malaysians and to UMNO supporters especially that they are seeking to fan or are condoning extremist sentiments in any way whatsoever.

The oblique warning by the prime minister that there is a possibility of another recurrence of racial violence may not have been apparent to political analysts, drowned by the assembly proceedings and verbiage. However, that this potential game changing option is being contemplated in high circles is beyond doubt.

May 13 was sparked off as a result of election results in which the opposition parties denied the UMNO-led Alliance their customary two-thirds majority in Parliament. Should the coming election fail to deliver the expected victory for UMNO, are we to expect hard-line UMNO leaders to resist the handing over of power peacefully and to agitate for power by other means?

Ominously, the scapegoat for any new outbreak of racial and religious violence has already been identified - not UMNO extremists but those on the other side of the political fence.

Besides being alerted to UMNO's and the BN's efforts to cling to power through well honed electoral manipulation (especially through massive gerrymandering and mal-apportionment in constituency electoral numbers) and using a combination of divide and rule racial and religious strategies as well as the buying up and harassment of the political opposition, it is important that the public - Malays and non-Malays - pay attention to - but are not intimidated by or co-opted into any attempted deployment of this ultimate game changing solution to the loss of political power. Neither should the public be confused or taken in by the spinning on who are the patriots and who are disloyal to the country.

Fascistic elements in UMNO (as well as various support elite groups in key institutions) will push the line that the best way to deal with the political challenges confronting the party and failure to win the coming elections is to declare emergency rule and to suspend the democratic process. A return to authoritarian rule a-la the period immediately after the May 13 racial unrest can then be justified in terms of preserving national unity, security and harmony and the thwarting of the enemies of the Malays and Islam. In reality, it will amount to an UMNO led coup and a major setback in the country's evolution to a normal democratic system.

It is hoped that wise and responsible leadership will prevail in the campaigning during the coming elections. All of us will be losers if the irrational logic and ferocity of the UMNO meeting is unleashed on the country in the next few months

