

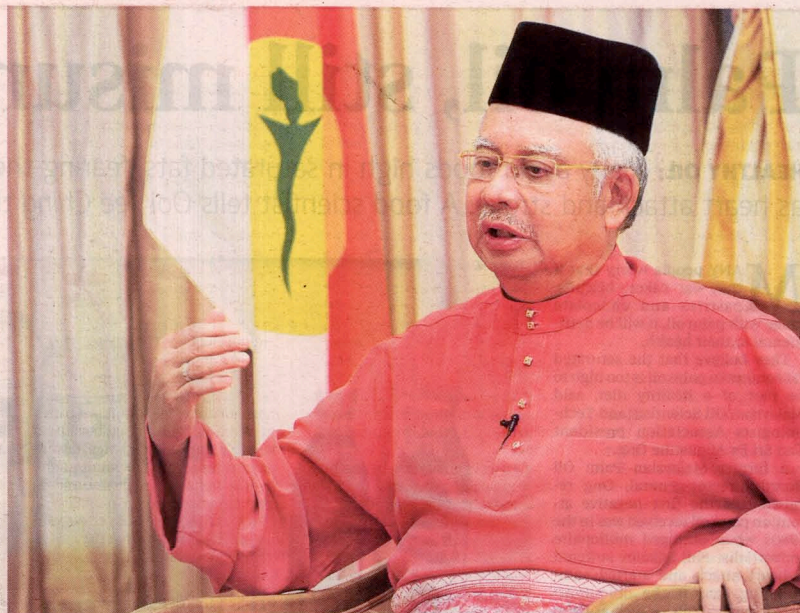
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SUNDAY INTERVIEW

'Don't stop working for the people'

RALLYING THE PARTY: Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak, in a special interview with Umno-Online in conjunction with the party's 66th anniversary on May 11, urges the party leadership at all levels to be fully prepared for the 13th general election

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Datuk Seri Najib Razak urges Umno members to put aside any bickering for the good of the party.

Question: Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh Datuk Seri. Congratulations on Umno celebrating its 66th anniversary on May 11. Reaching the age of 66 is testimony to the party's credibility and maturity in continuing the struggle to build a flourishing, peaceful, harmonious, developed and prosperous Malaysia.

As the seventh president of Umno, certainly you have gone through many bittersweet experiences which serve as a lesson and guidance for you to continue to spur and helm Umno so that it will remain relevant as the dominant party in Barisan Nasional, as a defender of the people and an inclusive party for all Malaysians.

Datuk Seri, Umno is celebrating its anniversary at a time when the whole nation is talking about the 13th general election. So, the anniversary celebration this time around has a profound significance because it will be the last before Parliament is dissolved to pave the way for the election.

Is the party, at all levels, ready to face this immense challenge and do you see things that need to be improved have been acted upon?

Answer: In general, Umno and our partners in BN have put in place all the necessary preparations to face the 13th general election, but as usual, we know that there will always be room for improvement, especially at the grassroots level, and this includes the role which can be played by the leaderships at the divisional, polling area and branch levels.

One of the aspects that I would like to emphasise is how important it is for us to work as a team, as a family that is not only strong but also solid and cohesive in the face of any situation. We should also be able to see that our threats, our

competitors are the opposition parties, not among ourselves.

So, in facing this election we must ensure that we can set aside any bickering or competition among us and focus our attention on efforts that we can mobilise to ensure that our machinery is strong and deployable, smooth and in full spirit for Umno and BN.

Question: We notice that Umno Day is being held at the branch meetings. Has the party at the grassroots level translated and focused all the strength and energy in ensuring that the Umno machinery is moving in tandem to ensure that the party and BN remain the people's choice, especially in the run-up to the 13th general election?

Answer: Yes, our machinery had undergone courses, been given guidance and held meetings and nearly all states have launched their election machinery. However, because of the fact that we are a huge party, with 3.3 million members altogether, we should also place in our members' thinking and mindset that they should also focus on efforts that they can do individually, not necessarily as top leaders or leaders at the divisional level, but as ordinary members. We should value our votes because there have been times when Umno members had not voted in elections. So, we must ensure that each of the 3.3 million members have a role to play.

Question: You have always emphasised the importance of Umno transforming itself to ensure it remains relevant. Do you see this actually happening in Umno so that it can be truly seen as dominant and the main choice of the people?

Answer: The journey has begun and we are seeing results. Among them is the amendment to the party's constitution so that Umno is more transparent, democratic and

inclusive. We have begun to internalise the 1Malaysia, People First, Performance Now concept, and a lot of programmes have been implemented by Umno based on this philosophy and vision.

However, I'm also a realist. To carry out a holistic transformation, it should be accompanied by a change in the culture of Umno. And to change human nature and the value system in the party will, of course, take time. But I feel that the journey has begun and that we are now seeing some changes, but we should push ahead with it because transforming Umno is a challenge which will definitely take time.

Question: So, the previous 65 years is still not enough and Umno should continue to transform itself for the people?

Answer: Actually Umno is already successful because if we look at the early stages, at the spirit to oppose the Malayan Union, the spirit to free our country, at that time, no one questioned the weaknesses of Umno or internal problems in Umno because our struggle is one and only one — we wanted

Umno to spearhead the country's struggle for independence. And during those times when we were struggling to achieve our independence, in the early stages in the 1960s and 1970s, our struggle was guided by only one objective.

But when our value system became mixed up with the aspirations to go after party posts and, to a certain extent, money politics had affected our party as the competition became more intense, our objec-

tives had somewhat been muddled up by self-interest and so on.

This is what we should avoid. As a party which has been in existence for so long, indeed our values and deeds are invaluable. But the voters of today will not look into our glorious past, in terms of history. They want to know what are our struggles for today and the future. We cannot, therefore, rely on history alone, we must look at Umno in the present context and in future.

This is what I want to stress so that each Umno leader internalises and projects the kind of leadership admired by the people, who will then give their full support to Umno and BN.

*"To carry out a holistic transformation, it should be accompanied by a change in the culture of Umno. And to change human nature and the value system in the party will, of course, take time."
Datuk Seri Najib Razak*

Question: Datuk Seri, you mentioned just now about a change in the party's culture and value system. What kind of culture would you like to inculcate in Umno within the time-frame for the country to achieve its Vision 2020?

Answer: Our cultural values, actually, need not deviate from the original, it's only that we need to emphasise the necessary aspects in the current context

as well as in the future. For instance, the value system, which places the party's interest above all, the value of loyalty to the party, discipline, teamwork and so on. These are the values which we have built all this while and should be preserved and defended.

In today's context, we retain our old values and adopt new ones, for example the readiness to master new skills and knowledge which are so important today, such as being

skilled in ICT (information and communications technology) for instance, being savvy in social media is another example, as well as possessing good communication skills. These are the skills we should all acquire and learn so that we, as leaders, will remain effective in all eras.

We have been effective in the previous era, the era when we strived for independence, we have also been effective during the post-independence era and during the time when we brought the nation from an agricultural country to an industrialised one. So, in the 21st century, in the context of a world without borders, in the context of information explosion, we should also demonstrate the effectiveness of Umno's leadership.

Question: Do you see the fighting spirit among Umno members waning today? If so, what do you think is the reason?

Answer: Yes, in some ways, because we have been successful and that Umno has done a lot of good deeds, so, a lot of people are well off economically and so on. They don't see that the objective of the struggle is huge; above everything else. So, if we have the attitude that says, "I want to give priority to my own aspirations as an individual more than that of the party", then this will create problems for our party. I am not saying that we cannot have personal aspirations, that we cannot have self-interests, but these must not take precedence over what is important, and what is more important is our party, the future of the party.

Question: You have clearly translated new and creative ideas. You have shown sincerity and honesty as a leader in tackling fear among the people, but there are views that this has not been translated and followed-up upon

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aggressively at the lower rung of the leadership. It seems that there is a vacuum?

Answer: This will take time. What we express in terms of policies and what we provide for as guidance, especially the agenda for our country, and the elements of transformation, all this will take time for them to be understood and appreciated. But I'm excited because of the support given to what we have been doing, such as the 1Malaysia and the People First vision, and we have the Government Transformation Programme, Economic Transformation Programme, Political Transformation Programme, which are all supported by Umno.

Umno has never objected to these nor has it questioned them. Umno fully supports these policies but we need to have them translated and we need to articulate how we can best implement the new agenda for the country, so that the people in general, who are outside the party, will be able to accept that Umno is the pillar of our country and Umno is a party truly able to take our country towards achieving Vision 2020.

Question: Are you confident that all that is being done under the 1Malaysia, People First concept, such as the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BRIM), will be well-received by the people or will there be any backlash?

Answer: I believe that the people responded well to it, and positively, because whenever I go to the field during the meet-the-people programmes, or during my walkabouts, I can see that the situation and the mood today is way better.

I can see that the response given to me and the deputy president, and other leaders, is more positive, but we should also realise that the opposition is very active: they will attack, disparage us and they will try to distract us by questioning the programmes we implement and creating issues out of non-issues. So, in the face of such a situation, we should do what is necessary to convince the people that all these negative elements in terms of perception should not be accepted by them.

Question: Let's talk about the issue of perception, Datuk Seri. The false perception created by the opposition is in stark contrast to BN's realist politics. Each time BN draws up programmes for the people, it will be spun and changed into something else to misguide public opinion. What is our role in Umno and in government to deal with such a perception?

Answer: We should realise that this is what the opposition has been doing and doing so in a fervent manner. They will try to spin issues, they will try negative spinning. In fact, they will even lie in their attempt to erode the people's confidence in the government. For instance, when we distributed the BRIM, which is hugely popular, they said the money that we used for that purpose was borrowed from abroad, which is an allegation devoid of any sense of

responsibility. This is an utterly false accusation.

We have successfully carried out the BRIM because we managed to increase the country's revenue by RM26 billion in just one year, which is the highest achievement by the government, but this achievement has not been given due credit, and was not appreciated. Instead, they accused us of doing something as if we were an irresponsible government. Actually, we are far from it.

They are the ones who promised something which was populist in nature. They are also resorting to making up stories, like one particular leader who claimed that I've met with chiefs of the armed forces to create something unconstitutional in the event that Umno and BN loses.

It's a lie of great proportions but they are willing to make this kind of claim so that, if they cannot convince the people, they can at least confuse them. This tactic used by the opposition.

Question: The opposition has been ruling only less than four years in certain states and already there are so many mistakes and problems. But there are still people who have been hoodwinked and are oblivious to the dangerous politics played by the opposition. What is your advice to the people so that they will not be fooled by the false rhetoric at a time when we are facing the 13th general election?

Answer: Yes, they promised a lot of things to win the support in the last general election. I've already said it, for instance in Selangor, I've highlighted many of the things which they had promised and what they have not done. We should keep on mentioning these things because if we say it only once or twice, it won't get drummed into the minds of the people, but if we emphasise and repeat it many times, people will realise that they have been cheated in the last election and that they should not be cheated again.

you see this as a reflection of Umno's strength to face the coming general election. That, if you announce and beat the war drums, we will be able to obtain a huge majority and recapture the lost states?

Answer: This is what I want to emphasise, that we cannot adopt a business-as-usual attitude. We must be aware of this, especially in states where we have lost. We must do something extraordinary in terms of our strategy, our commitment, planning, in terms of programmes which we have implemented and also our role in the online social media. All this should be reflected in the fact that we are in a state which we have lost, a state which was won by the opposition and we should do more than the ordinary.

Let's not do things or contribute in a flat or mediocre manner. If we want to topple the opposition-led governments in these states, we must strive more than usual. This is my message. We must unite more

deeds are big indeed. This is what I want to emphasise and foster. Apart from that, we also want to remind our members that in whatever we do, we must be consistent, be persistent so that the people will become more confident in Umno and BN.

Question: Umno is celebrating its 66th anniversary. Umno is also working with other BN component parties like MCA, Gerakan and so on. How do we ensure that this relationship is forged in a sincere and honest manner, as compared with the relationship among opposition parties?

Answer: Our ties are based on BN's philosophy and practice. We are well-suited with one another in BN. We are a coalition centred on reality and actuality.

We don't engage in play-acting with the people. One of the biggest theatrics of the opposition is their inability to form a shadow cabinet even though they have been talking about creating a two-party system in the country, but they failed to present a shadow cabinet to the people.

So, if they failed to do so when they are the opposition at the national-level, how can they be confident of wresting Putrajaya and ruling the country successfully? The question is not just about winning the elections, the issue is about administering the country. We are doing better for our country. This is a major issue.

In making evaluations, the voters should realise that what they need to take into account is not about who should be in Putrajaya but who actually is able to take our country, to lead our country in the next five years, and to bring more benefits to our country.

Question: It is clear that from the way Umno is working with BN component parties that Umno is not a racist party and not one which strives to advance the interest of the Malays in an extreme manner.

Answer: Umno has never been an extreme party. From the beginning, we were tolerant and inclusive towards other races. That is why we have been successful in the past 12 elections.

Although we experienced what was described as a political tsunami in 2008, we learned and realised that if we have committed a mistake we should own up to it, meaning we should do some soul-searching, and this we did.

We should also be brave in instituting changes in the party and the government does this by presenting its transformation plans to the people.

And now, we are entering a stage where we should convince the people about all the transformation initiatives which we have implemented and are implementing. Meaning, communicate effectively with the people so that they are able to see that our national transformation agenda is the best for them and for the future of our country.

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Datuk Seri Najib Razak says the opposition will resort to lies to attack the achievements of the government.

Question: But Datuk Seri, although the people might have been confused by the opposition, due to the lies being told to them, there seems to be no firm and bold action being taken to ensure this will not recur. It seems that this has been going on and on.

Answer: We will take action based on the scope of existing laws because in this era, we cannot take action by detaining people without any strong grounds. In fact, detaining people without trial cannot be done nowadays. So, whatever it is that they have been claiming, we should find sufficient evidence and there should be a conviction in court.

This is what makes it difficult for us because sometimes these accusations are hurled online, and the way they word it makes it difficult, at times, to take action. Nevertheless, if there is sufficient evidence, the government will take action after a thorough investigation has been carried out.

Question: They use lies and deception and they are a threat to the government and Umno. In the time that they have been ruling in certain states, has Umno been able to counter these lies by the opposition?

Answer: I can see there is indeed a wind of change in the states under their rule. The question is whether this has reached a stage where the people are prepared to change and return to the BN fold. This is where we should intensify our efforts to explain to the people that the opposition parties have no capability to administer the country and the states under them, contrary to what they have been claiming. All the promises they made would be left unfulfilled. This is what the Umno machinery should impress upon the people so that in the end, they will be able to judge who is right or wrong.

Question: Coming back to the 66th anniversary of Umno, do

than usual, only then can we have a better chance.

Question: Do you see us working more than usual and becoming united more than usual?

Answer: We have worked hard but I hope that we will work harder. I am someone who is not easily satisfied. It's not that we have not done it, indeed we have, maybe more than usual, but we have never come face-to-face with a scenario where we lost in five states; now, there are four under the opposition's rule. So we must further intensify what we are already doing.

Question: On the Umno Day celebration, what do you see in the theme for the celebration, "Umno, the People's Defender"?

Answer: This is in line with the People First philosophy, meaning we want to highlight and we want to remind people that Umno is the party that has been defending the people all this while and that our