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'Umno needs more keyboard warriors'

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PROTECTION: It's the only way to survive in new political landscape, says Najib

**AHMAD FAIRUZ OTHMAN
AND HALIM SAID**
PASIR GUDANG
news@nst.com.my

UMNO will have to address slander, allegations and negative perceptions spread online about the party by beefing up its own cyberwarriors.

Party president Datuk Seri Najib Razak said this was the only way to survive the political landscape as perception was formed despite reality being otherwise.

"There must be more keyboard warriors (in Umno) because the mindset of today is shaped by questions of perception versus reality. It's about truth versus falsehood, and the spread of slander and allegations at one's fingertips.

"Cyberspace is as important as the physical platform. It is not about face-to-face communication now, but Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram and others that have become important platforms in politics in this new landscape," he said when opening the Pasir Gudang Umno division meeting at Taman Mawar multipurpose hall here yesterday.

Najib, who is also the prime minister, said the opposition had taken advantage of cyber platforms to spread slander, but were being irresponsible as they need not deliver on development for the people.

"The opposition do not need to do much as they can form a perception to create doubt. They don't need to deliver anything.

"If they can create doubt in the minds of people, it is enough to reduce support towards Umno and Barisan Nasional."

Najib said that the perception created of Umno had led the party to its current position, and the onus was now on its leaders and members to work hard to improve the situation.

He urged the people not be blindsided by the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) issue, which came at the cost of the country's other achievements.

He said one such achievement was Malaysia's top 20-government-linked companies (GLCs) having experienced threefold growth in market capitalisation in the past 10 years, while the success of the Bumiputera Economic Empowerment Programme was another.

"We must understand that 1MDB has not suffered any losses, but it has debts. We are in the midst of monetising the assets."

Najib said much of the information on social media about 1MDB was incorrect and was causing negative perceptions of the company.

He said debts incurred by 1MDB would be reduced within the next five months, and announcements would be made on the matter.

Najib expressed disappointment with party members who chose to believe the negative perception of issues such as 1MDB, instead of focusing on the government's many good deeds.

"For instance, (previously) Malaysia Airlines had been operating at a loss, and (the government) injected RM6 billion into it.

"In the past, before there was social media, there were big issues but once people knew about it, it had passed.

"Today, people know about things even before anything happens. When there is a hot issue, we (government) become a target for attacks."

Najib thanked the Johor Umno liaison committee under Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, who is also Johor menteri besar, and expressed his appreciation for the trust given to him to resolve the issue.

"As president, I will do my best to steer the party forward in spite of the challenges we are facing, which requires us to do more.

"As Khaled said, light needs to be shed and I and the rest of the leadership will see to it," he said.

Khaled had, in his welcoming speech at the same event, said Umno was not in its best shape, and that the grassroots were concerned about issues at national level.