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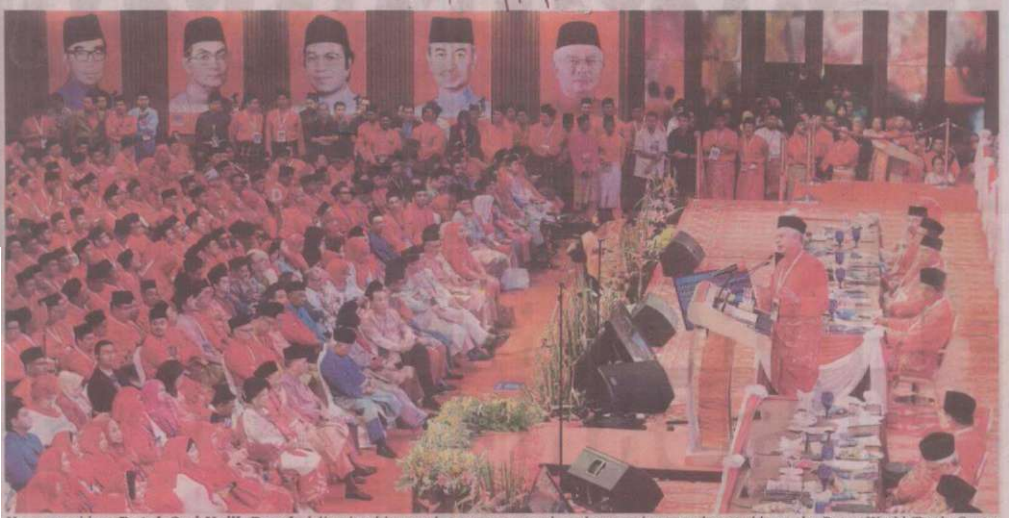
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Najib: Loyalty to party a core value

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RESOLUTE: Party must get back on united course to grow stronger, says party president

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Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak delivering his speech to a rapt crowd at the party's general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday.

UMNO president Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday delivered a strong message in his opening speech at the party general assembly: that the time for internal bickering was over and the party should get back on its united course to stay stronger.

The underlying tone in the assertive, 90-minute speech was that the prime minister is still firmly in charge of the party that has been in power since Merdeka.

"No retreat, no surrender," Najib told party loyalists amid roars of approval.

"We will not allow Umno's struggle to be destroyed. We will remain resolute," he said, amid the sea of red in the cavernous Merdeka Hall.

"Hold your determination and spirits high, as high as the stars in the sky, though there may be those who turn their backs on us, though we are pushed so we would fall, there shall be no retreat, no surrender. No retreat! No surrender!"

In a departure from tradition, Najib did not dwell much on gov-

ernment policies, but more on internal party issues. In his speech, more specifically, taking aim at his estranged deputy, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, and former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

This assembly is also not about the general election, which is some two or three years away, but more about stabilising the presidency and ensuring Najib survives the ordeal following the incessant at-

tacks against him over the 1Malaysia Development Bhd and RM2.6 billion political funding issues.

The speech is also meant to solidify his position in the party, and send a strong message to Muhyiddin that this is a battle not worth fighting for and he and his supporters should realign themselves and remain loyal under one leader.

"Loyalty should not be seen just as an important value, but must be part of the core values and principles of Umno members at all levels, right up to the key leaders," he said, in an indirect reference to Muhyiddin.

"Only then can there be discipline, rules and order in an organisation like Umno. Scholars have said that even undisputed rights and truths can lose out to lies

and vanity by those who like to lie and have bad intentions," he said.

No doubt it was a difficult speech for him, but he managed to send a clear signal to Dr Mahathir, sitting on the front row and wearing a pensive look throughout the address, that he intended to carry on with his job of governing the nation and ignore Dr Mahathir's calls for his ouster.