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Reports by MAZWIN NIK ANIS, RAZAK AHMAD, SIRA HABIBU, MARTIN CARVALHO, LOSHANA K. SHAGAR, RAHIMY RAHIM, HEMANANTHANI SIVANAND, FIRDAOUS FADZIL, RAHMAH GHAZALI, AKIL YUNUS and D. KANYAKUMARI

'There's no turning back'

Najib: I will not bow to demands for my ouster

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One voice: The Wanita delegates showing their support for Najib at the Umno assembly in Putra World Trade Centre.

DATUK Seri Najib Tun Razak confronted his attackers and vowed never to retreat or surrender, in a rousing opening speech at the Umno general assembly.

In the presence of his critics, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Umno deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and vice-president Datuk Seri Shapie Apdal, Najib said he was willing to negotiate with those who disagreed with him but would not bow to demands for his ouster.

"Despite a mountain of obstacles and no matter how great the opposition, never once will I surrender.

"I will bravely confront the problems to resolve them so that I can continue to lead Umno to victory," the party president said, getting a standing ovation from a sea of more than 2,500 delegates dressed in red at the Merdeka Hall of the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday.

Acknowledging the attacks against him, which unfolded over the past year, Najib said this year's assembly was clearly different due to the extraordinary expectations placed on him.

"I am a president and leader but I am also a human being like the rest of you. Each of us have our strengths. I am a gentleman and whatever issues arise, let us meet and sit down to discuss through proper channels," he said.

Najib said that although he had been deeply hurt by the attacks against him as Umno president, he took heed of the teachings of Islam.

"I choose to be magnanimous," he said. Najib expressed his grati-

tude for the show of support shown by members of Wanita Umno, Umno Youth and Puteri Umno in their assemblies on Wednesday.

"I am confident and believe, looking at the tempo and spirit which they have shown in the past few days, that the majority are firmly tied in their support of my leadership," he added.

Najib urged the delegates to maintain their confidence in his leadership and his ability to resolve matters, such as the Malaysia Development Berhad and political donation issues.

"What's important is that I am confident that I am on the side of right and that truth will prevail," he added.

He said when the time eventually came for the baton of leadership to be passed on, he could not hand it over without first making sure that

all party causes and issues had been settled.

"We must ensure that the situation in our party and among the ranks of our members is restored because if not, as advised by religious scholars, I would be a cowardly person," said Najib.

Stressing the importance of being loyal to the party leader, Najib said his own record throughout his long involvement in politics, which would reach the 40-year milestone next March, reflected this principle.

"Throughout the troubles and hardships I have faced in my career as a politician and member of the administration, everyone knows that this person named Najib Razak is not confrontational.

"I have also never pushed out anyone, what more betray Umno," he said.

Najib related to the delegates

how he had continued to support former party president Dr Mahathir and defended him in 1987 when the party was split.

Najib, who was then Umno Youth chief said he did this out of a sense of love and loyalty to the party leadership, and pointed out that it had helped to ensure Dr Mahathir remained Umno president and prime minister.

Ending his 90-minute speech with a spirited call to Umno members to rally behind him, Najib asked them to help him steer Malaysia to greater heights.

"Let us pin a determination and desire as high as the stars in the sky, that even though there are those who betray us and even if we are pushed repeatedly, there shall be no retreat, no surrender," said Najib, drawing another standing ovation from the delegates.