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Najib: Obedience to leader key to unity

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> Umno practice all along to stand by leader at all times, PM tells delegates

BY KAREN ARUKESAMY AND ELLY FAZANIZA
newsdesk@thesundaily.com



Najib delivering the much-awaited presidential speech at the Umno general assembly yesterday.

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak yesterday said obedience to the leader is Umno's way of keeping the party united.

Stressing on how it has been Umno's practice all along to obey and back the leader in all circumstances, Najib said general unity in Islam, it is "mandatory" for the people to obey the ruling leader.

"If you look at the history of organisations, you will see that if strong loyalty does not exist in the individual to uphold the leader or leadership, the structure would be weakened and eventually fail," he said.

Citing Malay history, Najib said loyalty and obedience to leaders have been manifested throughout time.

Loyalty and obedience are not just mere values but the principles and characters that should become the flesh and blood within each Umno member from the bottom to the

top leadership.

"Only then will there be discipline and order in Umno," he told the 2,654 delegates from 191 divisions during his presidential speech at the 69A Umno general assembly.

Noting there had been "extraordinary expectations" for the assembly, Najib acknowledged that there were people attending the event with heavy issues on their chests after recent episodes.

However, he expressed confidence that he still holds the majority support in the party based on the tone and mood at the wings' assemblies on Wednesday.

"I am confident, looking at the spirit displayed by the delegates, the majority are still steadfast behind my leadership. When faced with problems, we should never run away. That is my principle."

"Even if the challenges are as high as a mountain and

however great the opposition, I will never back down," Najib said to loud cheers and a standing ovation by all, except deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, vice-president Datuk Seri Mohd

Shafie Apdal, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah, who remained seated and silent throughout.

Najib claimed it is a known fact in Urano that he is not a "non-rational" person. "I have never attempted to topple anyone, what more betray the beloved Umno party," he said, gesturing towards where Mahathir was seated.

He also took a swipe several times at Umno leaders who have been critical of him.

"Malaysia jumped two spots to 18 in the world economic forum report on global competitiveness. So how then can someone say we are a failed state or will become beggars under my leadership?" he said, apparently hitting at Mahathir's allegations against him.

Najib said he had, in a "humble tone" ("nada yang tawadu") said in Parliament that although he is the party president, he is human too.

On issues affecting Umno, he said the iMalaysia Development Bhd (iMADB) affair is in the process of being settled.

With the sale of the Edra power company, the iMADB debt has been reduced by RM7 billion, he said.

As for the RM2.6 billion deposited into his bank account, he said the money, as explained in

Parliament and in detail at the earlier briefing for Umno delegates, was a political donation from abroad and not from iMADB.

Najib also said Umno's struggle is not only confined to the peninsula, but also covers Sabah and Sarawak through assistance provided to the Barisan Nasional component parties there.

"Recently, I announced that empowerment which involves federal departments and agencies will be given to the Sabah and Sarawak governments, while in the 2016 Budget, we stated our commitment to building the toU-free

x,796km Pan Borneo Highway covering both states," he said.

On the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), Najib said it is a free trade agreement that is comprehensive and encompasses a wide scope.

"The TPPA is in line with the Islamic principle of 'tabahuf ikhtisad' or economic cooperation."

Najib also expressed gratitude that more than 90% of the pledges made during the 13th general election had been successfully implemented.

This, he said, proved that the government fulfils its promises.

On the nation's economy, he said external factors have affected not just Malaysia but also other developing countries.

"The ringgit's depreciation was due to external influences and not because of our failure to manage the economy," he said, adding that the implementation of the goods and services tax (GST), although unpopular, was an appropriate action that has protected the people from having to face a heavier burden.

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Umno willing to cooperate with PAS

UMNO is willing to engage in political cooperation with any party, including PAS, to strengthen the Muslim community, said Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Commenting on Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak's offer of an olive branch ("tali silaturahmi") to PAS, he said the agenda on togetherness among Islamic bodies should be on strengthening Islam without setting aside the interests of other religions.

Ahmad Zahid, who is

also deputy prime minister, said for cooperation between Umno and PAS to work, there should be commitment from both parties.

"Hopefully, it materialises in the interest of the ummah," he told a media conference after the opening of the Umno general assembly yesterday.

Najib, who is also prime minister, in his policy speech had offered to foster close ties with PAS to together build the nation in accordance with the Islamic doctrine since PAS

is no longer with the opposition pact.

Ahmad Zahid said Najib's speech had provided delegates with a better understanding of current issues.

However, the explanation should also be extended to the general public to enable them to understand the issues better.

This responsibility should not be left to the president alone, but should also be carried out by Umno leaders at all levels, including state and division, he said. - Bernama