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Best ever caucus, says Najib

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ENERGISED:

Assembly ends on a high note as party leaders rally behind president



KUALA LUMPUR

UMNO ended its annual general assembly on a vivacious mood yesterday with Prime Minister and party president Datuk Seri Najib Razak vowing to make Malaysia a better nation as party leaders rallied strongly behind him ahead of the impending general election.

In many ways, it was a heartening end to what had been a politically defining week for the president, who put his leadership to test amid the incessant opposition attacks against the government.

In stark contrast to last year's subdued session, there was no visible strain during the week-long assembly, leading to Najib to call it the "best ever" Umno caucus and described his current team as a group of committed leaders.

"I have never doubted their loyalty," he said of the two vice-presidents, Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, and the wing heads.

He also received a standing ovation at the end of his hour-long address amid shouts of "Long Live Umno", "Long Live BN" and "Long Live Malaysia".

In his closing speech, Najib countered some negative public perceptions by painting a big picture of his economic agenda, saying that the country's RM1.3 trillion-economy would grow to RM2 trillion in seven years to create more jobs and raise income.

He also allayed concerns about the high cost of living, unveiled additional affordable housing programmes, offered help for Felda settlers and rallied the Muslims in support of the Rohingya, in defiance of the Myanmar government.

He also took a swipe at Tun Dr

Mahathir Mohamad, whom, he said, had caused the nation to "lose a hundred billion" during his 22-year rule and had formed a new alliance with DAP, the No. 1 enemy of Umno.

Najib also showed to delegates a video showing former DAP strongman Hew Kuan Yau speaking during a *ceramah* at the recent Sarawak state election, calling on voters to elect a DAP Malay candidate to pit the Malays against the Malays.

In his speech, Najib said his National Transformation 2050 plan (TN50) proved that his party did not only look after the interests of party members but also the entire 31 million Malaysians.

Yesterday's scene was a marked contrast from last year's proceedings when the then Umno deputy president, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, appeared visibly stone-faced despite Najib extending an olive branch to his ardent opponent for the sake of Umno unity.

Zahid, the de-facto deputy president, started off his speech with shouts of "Long Live Najib" and declared that he would stay loyal to the party president.

The home minister said the government had set up a high-level task force to investigate illegal foreign funding of several pro-opposition entities, including Bersih and Malaysiakini.

Hishammuddin said those who attended this year's assembly were those who chose to remain loyal to Umno, adding that there should not be anymore questions raised or any need to look back at the issues fronting the party.

"Continue to bring this high spirit with you as we face the general election. Ensure this wave leads to a political tsunami to ensure Barisan Nasional's win," he said.

Umno Youth's adherence to the principle of *wala'* (loyalty) towards

the top leadership was not a form of blind loyalty, its chief said.

"This is not a blind loyalty," Khairy Jamaluddin said in his winding-up speech.

"For those who do not fully understand the principle of *wala'*, it is not a blind allegiance and loyalty. It is based on loyalty towards a leadership that has never crossed the line."

He said the 600,000-member strong wing would help deliver the votes in the next general election.

"If you want us to be your Tariq bin Ziyad (a medieval Muslim commander who led troops in Spain), we will be your Rock of Gibraltar," he said to thunderous applause from the delegates.

(If someone says something is "like the Rock of Gibraltar", it means it is very solid and strong and will not be destroyed.)

Wanita Umno chief Tan Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil also reiterated the wing's undivided support for Najib.

"We've never budged, despite challenges and obstacles. We remain loyal to the pillar of our struggles. Wanita will be loyal to our president."

Puteri Umno chief Datuk Mas Ermeyati Samsudin, in her speech, said the wing would go all out to ensure that Umno performs well in the upcoming polls.

"This is the time for us to draw closer together," she said.

"Whether or not you have positions, whether or not your position is high, everyone has to do their job," she said.

Salient points in Najib's closing speech

- 1 This year's Umno General Assembly is the best one yet; **Umno members are very united under strong leadership.**
- 2 Umno has resolved its **internal issues** and is now ready to head for the 14th General Election.
- 3 The **prime minister's participation in the Rohingya rally today** is not about meddling in Myanmar's affairs but on humanitarian grounds.
- 4 The government has **introduced several schemes to help Malaysians own homes at affordable prices**, including via the Youth Transit Home and My Beautiful New Home projects.
- 5 The fate of **54 parliamentary seats across the country** is dependent on the support of Felda settlers.
- 6 The country's **550,000 Felda settlers will profit from the recent deal involving China** importing more palm oil from Malaysia.
- 7 Malaysia must be listed among **the world's top 20 nations** and the 2050 National Transformation (TN50) initiative will help realise this dream.
- 8 The government is set to **introduce measures soon to resolve key issues faced by Felda settlers**, including late payments and large debts.
- 9 Malaysia is set to become a **RM2 trillion economy** if gross domestic product grows at five per cent annually for the next seven years.
- 10 At least **50 per cent of the retailers doing business in the first phase of MRT stations must be made up of Bumiputera entrepreneurs.**

