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# Jumping on Najib's bandwagon

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has survived a challenging year, he is in full control of Umno and everyone wants to be the president's men again.

THE sense about the general assembly this year is that everybody wants to be on the president's team.

There has been a rather unabashed rush to get back into the good books of Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Najib has had two of the most challenging years of his career, but the storm has passed.

He is in control of the party, quite unassailable after surviving one attempt after another to unseat him. The party is at its most stable since Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad began his attacks in 2014.

His enemies are all outside and Najib is surrounded by those loyal to him and the party.

And that was how he began his presidential address. It was not the usual policy speech, but an outright political speech to cap a highly political year.

He knew the stage looked different this year without Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal and he addressed it skilfully with a Malay *pantun* of sorts to indicate that what the party lost in Pagoh, it has found in Bagan Datoh.

And what the party found less than satisfactory in Semporna, it has replaced with Sembrong.

Pagoh is, of course, Muhyiddin's seat while Bagan Datoh is Datuk

Analysis  
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Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's. Semporna is Shafie's seat while Sembrong is Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein's seat.

The delegates from Pagoh and Semporna also got to their feet to acknowledge cheers from the floor.

It was to show that the two divisions have not fallen apart despite the exit of top leaders.

"He looks very much in control, he is telling the delegates that the house is in order.

"Last year was so tense for them, but this year they feel they can breathe normally again, pause and reflect," said KRA political risk analyst Amir Fareed Rahim.

For instance, said Amir, the string of demands that the Wanita Umno wing is making has to do with the fact that they know he is fully in charge and can give them what they want.

At the Umno Youth assembly on Tuesday, the Tampin Youth chief who was speaking at the rostrum when Najib popped in to have a

look, quickly apologised to the Umno president for criticising him over the 1MDB issue last year.

Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin also used the assembly to affirm that he is with Team Najib.

And when the debates began at the general assembly yesterday, it was evident that the delegates had drawn the line between who deserves their loyalty and those leaders who are now with the Opposition.

Najib started using visuals for his presidential speeches a few years ago.

His team has mastered the art and there was a sophisticated display of pictures, quotes and graphics lighting up the giant high definition screen above the stage as he spoke.

Jeers and catcalls erupted at the images of Dr Mahathir, Muhyiddin and Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir – the delegates call him "boi boi" – taking part in the Bersih rally, dressed in yellow.

But the loudest jeers were reserved for the image of their former leaders standing alongside DAP leader Lim Kit Siang, the man whose politics has been about running down Umno.

Najib walked the delegates through all those instances that the

party stood by Dr Mahathir – the elder man's fight with Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, the deregistration of Umno, the Asian financial crisis, and the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The fact that their national statesman had turned opposition figure was seen as the "height of betrayal" to the party.

Quite a bit of Najib's speech was devoted to acknowledging the steady role of the Wanita, Youth and Puteri wings throughout last year's crisis.

He wanted to signal to one and all that the three wings are with him despite the exit of big names.

The senior ladies have been his strength and he paid special tribute to Wanita chief Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jilil, urging the hall to rise to their feet and applaud the backbone of Umno.

Even the president knows better than to "play-play" with these ladies.

Addressing the Youth chief as "anakanda Khairy", he described him as the "future of Umno", using the Arabic term, "jil Umno".

Khairy's ties with Najib have been patchy at best and it is well known that Najib had backed Mukhriz for Youth chief during the 2009 party election.

But there has been a turning point and the recognition was a big

moment for the Youth and Sports Minister whom Najib said will help lead the TN50 generation, the vision plan to usher in a new generation of Malaysians by 2050.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of Najib's speech was when a picture of him and the PAS president appeared on the screen as he thanked PAS for boycotting the Bersih protest. Something is definitely brewing behind the scenes.

The general assembly has been running like clockwork, thanks largely to Umno executive secretary and avowed Najib loyalist Datuk Rauf Yusoh.

Most of all, the mood on the floor spoke volumes about the way the party is back on track.

Yes, there were delegates catching forty winks or chatting away during the debates.

But delegates were also more aggressive and engaged, cheering, applauding and calling out comments during the debates.

The emotions also came out and tears flowed among many delegates when Najib recited a heartfelt prayer for their party.

It was a glimpse into the emotional bond that Umno members have for their party, something which those who left to work with the Opposition underestimated.

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