

'Think of way forward'

PM wants Umno delegates to impart ideas for 9MP

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SHARING A LIGHT MOMENT: Najib chatting with Abdullah (right) at PWTC in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

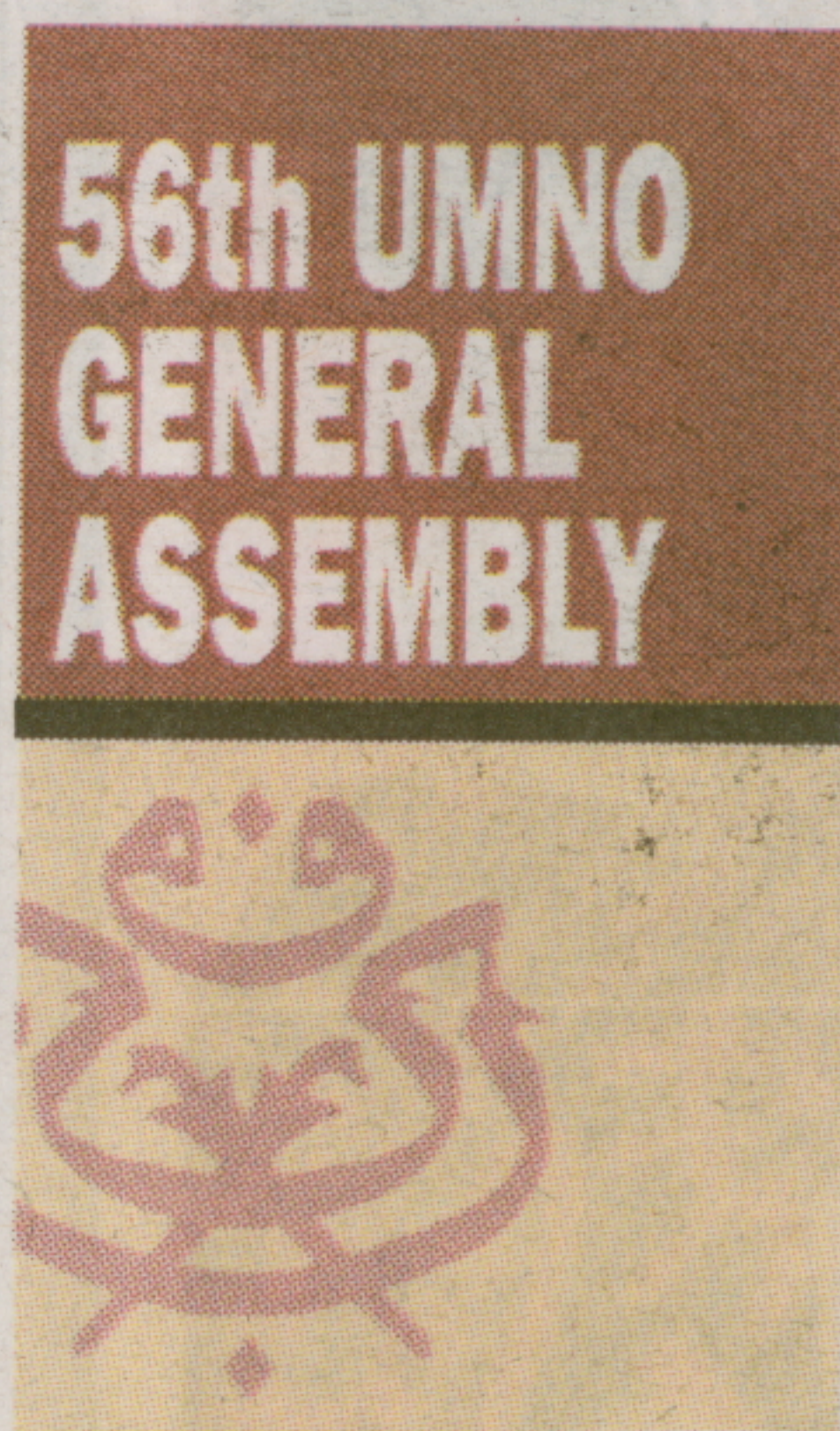
■ **By Abdul Razak Ahmad and Sheridan Mahavera**

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Umno is at a crossroads, and members must think of the way forward. This was the main message by party president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi ahead of the 56th Umno annual general assembly, which starts on Thursday.

The three-day assembly would be the last opportunity for delegates to give concrete suggestions on what should be included in the Ninth Malaysia Plan for the future of the Malays, he said.

Abdullah said the assembly was being held at a critical juncture as it was at the tail-end of the Eighth Malaysia Plan and the Government's preparations for the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

"By next year's assembly, the Government will be implementing the Ninth Malaysia Plan.



"So I hope Umno delegates will take this opportunity to discuss seriously all issues related to the nation's development and to the development and progress of the Malays and Bumiputeras in our country."

Abdullah told reporters after a pre-council briefing for party delegates at the Putra World Trade Centre here that he wanted del-

legates to discuss the implementation of the Eighth Plan and what they expect from the Ninth Plan, as well as specific suggestions they would want to present at the assembly.

"The ruling party for the Malays is faced with a duty and responsibility in this important assembly and must make use of the opportunity to debate, discuss and give meaningful and beneficial views," Abdullah said.

"These would be the ingredients that can be used in drawing up the Ninth Malaysia Plan."

Abdullah also spoke at length on a buffet of issues during the pre-council briefing, including the party's disciplinary board, the country's budget deficit, the Approved Permit (AP) system and the construction sector.

To a question, Abdullah said he did not think that suspended party vice-president Tan Sri Mohd Isa Samad would attend the assembly

as an observer.

Met after the briefing, Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said delegates welcomed Abdullah's explanation of the AP system.

"What was briefed to us today doesn't raise many issues," Hishammuddin said. "It becomes an issue only if the list of people who received APs was not revealed."

"But the list has come out, so take it as it is. Nothing more, nothing less."

Supreme council member Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik said Abdullah elaborated on the need to reduce the deficit to manageable proportions to improve the country's growth rate.

Abdullah also stressed the importance of awarding contracts only to those with proven track records and ensuring that Malay contractors did not sell their contracts, Rahim said.