

Lesson from a general of old
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These traits will help Umno do well in polls

IT was not the first time, nor the second or third that we have heard the top leader of the country's biggest political party, Umno, pleading for loyalty from party members.

Past Umno presidents had made such calls during their terms in office.

Yesterday, it was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's turn.

So, what makes the "loyalty call" from the party president at this year's general assembly significant to the position of Umno in the country's mainstream?

Certainly Najib did not issue the reminder to Umno's three million members for his own sake.

At the same time, the party needs some form of resurrection of its image, both in the eyes of the Malays, whom it is supposed to be representing, and the other races in the country.

For Umno to realise this aspiration, it needs the full backing of its members, from top to bottom; this will enable it to improve and perfect its struggles, some of which might have gone off track.

For this to work, there must be loyalty which requires members to close ranks and be committed to discard the politics of self-interest.

Their love for Umno, which is reflected in the display of loyalty to the party, will see Umno through its most testing time in its 65-year history.

Najib was spot-on when he implied that Umno could do without back-stabbers, those who, when faced with a situation, would nod or shake their heads first but only to act to the contrary afterwards.

Umno does not want to see a repeat of what happened in the 2008 general election, when it was jolted by the presence of a sizeable number of traitors.

Election post-mortem findings had shown that even Umno's own members did not vote for its candidates.

The imminent 13th general election is most crucial for Umno's relevance and the toughest ever and, any form of sabotage from the enemies within would be detrimental to the party.

Since most of the problems on Umno's ground is always pointed to serious factionalism, Najib knows it will be a challenge for the Umno leadership to convince the power brokers in the party and the division chiefs that the next general election is a battle for the party's survival.

His ability to convince the Umno warlords not to challenge him over his choice of candidates and to put party above self, will be half the battle won.

With the general election looming, party members have to forget, for the time being, contests for positions in the party.

Instead they should focus on their loyalty to the party and in strengthening the election machinery at all levels.

The Umno president is hopeful that the story of Khalid al-Walid, a war general in the Muslim world and Usamah bin Zaid which he related in his hour-long policy speech at the assembly, would serve as lesson to his party members.

Khalid had obediently stepped down as directed by the caliph, and served as an ordinary soldier after Usamah, still a teenager and without experience in the war zone, had been tasked with leading troops into battle.

Such is the spirit that election candidate aspirants need to possess.

Najib also hopes the spirit of the Maal Hijrah celebration recently, would somehow inspire the members to embark on a meaningful journey that would take the party to greater heights through adoption of the positive qualities of the prophet, which among others are loyalty, sincerity, patience and willingness to make sacrifices.

He may have asserted on the bai'ah or pledge of allegiance to the party, during the closed-door briefing to divisional heads and delegates on Tuesday but that does not mean he wants to see the pledge made by those concerned.

It would not be really necessary at all if Umno members are willing to return to basics.

Umno need not follow its arch-rival Pas which requires its election candidates to pledge bai'ah for as long as its members are committed to remain loyal to the party in the true sense of word.

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