

As polls loom, Umno delegates swear loyalty to party
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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 3 — The Umno general assembly ended today with delegates taking the “sumpah bai’ah” (oath of allegiance), a symbolic move to prevent infighting and internal sabotage ahead of an election expected soon.

Najib delivers his closing address at the Umno general assembly in Kuala Lumpur on December 3, 2011. — Reuters pic
Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak later told the crowd of 5,477 delegates at Dewan Merdeka that the coming polls would be “the most critical” to date for the ruling party, repeatedly reminding members of the importance of standing united.

“The bai’ah oath led by my deputy (Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin) earlier reflects our readiness to put aside differences as well as actions that could threaten the party.

“I hope we can fulfil this promise,” he said during a brief media conference after closing the assembly.

As it readies for an election widely speculated to be called early next year, Umno is said to be worried that incessant infighting among party members may destroy the party’s chances of a comfortable victory.

In a recent interview with The Malaysian Insider, Umno supreme council member Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz said members have yet to learn from Election 2008, which saw the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) pact lose five states to the opposition.

Najib has been taking pains to stress repeatedly to delegates of the importance of fielding winnable candidates for the polls, pleading with them to “jangan tikam belakang (do not backstab)” if they were not chosen for the contest.

“This oath is important because it was done in front of party leaders and ensures we will stay loyal in the elections.

“You see, there were many areas, like Kedah, where BN lost because of spoilt votes... meaning, sabotage. When the majority is less than the spoilt votes, it means there was sabotage,” Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin told reporters after today’s assembly.

Several Umno leaders, including vice-presidents Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal have expressed their willingness to bow out from the polls if they do not qualify as winnable candidates.

At a press conference today, Najib also confirmed that several Umno lawmakers have said the same.

“Some have met me in private, I do not have to mention who.

“New faces are needed (for people) to see Umno as a party which has new blood,” said the Umno president.

He said that this was part of his plan to project Umno as a "dynamic party, ready for change."

Najib said he viewed this year's party assembly as a success, and that it was a sign of Umno's "recovery" since Election 2008.

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