

**Self-Centred Leaders Overshadow UMNO's Transformation**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 17 (Bernama) -- The transformation agenda of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has continued to capture the imagination of members of the largest Malay party, Umno.

Najib has frequently touched on the agenda to ensure that the party is on the right track, including ensuring that only winnable candidates contest in the next general election as well as rejuvenating the party.

Nevertheless, political observers see a small group of leaders holding on tightly to their posts, worried that they may lose what they have unless they are fielded as electoral candidates.

According to political analyst Md Shukri Shuib, such leaders should realise that the real agenda of Umno is still its struggle for religion, race and country.

He said changes are badly needed in Umno but initiatives towards that will be overshadowed by the existence of leaders who put their own interests above the party's.

The Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) political and international studies lecturer said these handful of leaders should be rejected as they are only parasites destroying the party from the inside.

"This self-centred attitude of such leaders can be akin to people who burn down their alma mater as they want to deny others the opportunity to study.

"Umno has been struggling for religion, race and country as the backbone of the Malaysian administration and the party's struggle should not be diverted to serve these self-centred leaders only," he said.

Md Shukri said senior leaders should become mentors of the younger generation who would inevitably be steering the nation's future.

"Second echelon leaders should be trained and exposed to the experience of senior leaders. We should enrich the experience of our young people so that they obtain comprehensive knowledge on politics," he said.

Supporting the statement, another political observer Khairuddin Mohd Zain said that rejuvenating Umno should not be limited to age as a criteria as it also meant the introduction of new faces free from the elements detrimental to the party.

"When we talk of rejuvenating Umno, it does not refer to youths from the angle of age. What can be more influential are the people without political baggage, unblemished by issues which can tarnish the image of the party.

"Our president's message is clear. Winnable candidates means reducing tainted faces with problems which can be a liability to the party and putting forward faces which are more transparent, have better integrity and the people are comfortable with," said the International Islamic University alumni committee member.

Asked about the attitude of some leaders who may be disappointed when unselected as candidates, Khairuddin said the people themselves would assess the sincerity of these individuals.

"Our community is getting more educated and such leaders will have problems with their credibility. When you get angry with someone because you did not get something, that shows that you are not sincere," he said.

According to Khairuddin, the main problem of Umno in the last few years is that it has been seen as focusing less on efforts to produce second echelon leaders.

Nevertheless, he felt that Najib has succeeded in arresting the situation with his style of leadership.

"Najib has a clear picture of what he's going to do but with a handful of grassroots leaders bent on holding on to their posts, this could show the community that the grassroots are not in support of the aspirations of the top leadership," he said.

Khairuddin said he felt that the next general election is an excellent opportunity for Umno to put forward credible, idealistic and people-friendly individuals as candidates.

"The general election will be a window for Umno to change or find a new value system suitable with the times as we should realise that the younger members of the community tend to appreciate leaders who are transparent and fair," he said.

An Umno Youth member, Mohamad Nazmi Zaidi Moni, regarded the cooperation between the old and new groups as most important for the survival of the party.

The Seri Setia Lembah Keramat Umno Youth information chief said the experience and guidance of the senior leaders were still needed in the current political arena.

"The younger groups are more critical but they lack the drive of the classic groups during the Merdeka days.

"To ensure that the struggle of the party continues, it is the responsibility of the leaders to guide the younger leaders and not cut them out and shut the door of opportunity, he said.

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