

Winners and losers at Umno assembly 2011
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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 3 — In a few hours, the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) will be empty of the thousands of delegates, observers and supporters attending the annual Umno general assembly. The five-day meeting saw a slew of speeches that touched on the issues facing the dominant party in the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

Here are the winners and losers.

WINNERS: Hardliners in Umno because the speeches and tone from this year's assembly suggest that the party has moved further away from the centre. Umno used to be a broad church of opinions from the farmers, religious scholars to the teachers and businessmen and pure political animals concerned about social justice, economy, religion and race.

Today, race is the dominant theme and the supremacy of the Malay race is being used to bulldoze and shut out other voices in the party. The DAP was singled out as the main cause impeding unity talks between the Malay parties. Ironically, PAS was formed by the Umno religious wing in 1951 and both parties only worked together in 1973 to 1977 in the aftermath of the May 13 race riots.

But the DAP gets the blame for the lack of Malay unity and the race riots.

WINNER: Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil. Try as a few Umno delegates did, no one could shake the Wanita Umno chief off her perch because of the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) scandal involving her family. She stuck to her guns, insinuated that the attack was meant to weaken the wing that is seen as the backbone of Umno.

It also proved that Umno defends its own no matter the degree of the stench. Shahrizat isn't the first and won't be the last Umno leader to be grilled over allegations of misconduct by family members. And she won't be the first to be dumped by Umno immediately too.

She lives to fight another day. It is up to the party to decide whether Shahrizat is a millstone around the party's neck in the coming general election.

LOSERS: Malaysians. Because Umno looks set to win the polls in the next general election but yet looks woefully ill-equipped to lead a multiracial country. Sticking to parochial sentiments to fire up its members is outdated for any party that has been at the helm of a country for more than 50 years. One expects delegates to articulate a vision to continue on its previous success but that did not happen.

Instead, delegates harped on age-old themes of having their culture and faith eroded by political foes taking over the country. That they are the only guarantee of faith and culture. What about the economy? What about the reforms? What about Malaysia?

LOSERS: Chinese, Indians, Kadazandusuns, Christians, Buddhists, etc. After five decades of contributing to the development of this country, Umno still views people from this group with suspicion. That they can only be good if they are subservient to Umno. Everything is centred around Umno. Malaysia fails when Umno falls.

But they didn't articulate the vision for continued success. They didn't talk about public funds being used wantonly in high-impact projects by those related to Umno leaders. Instead, everyone is at fault except those in Umno.

The party lost another chance to clean its stables and start winning the trust of those who abandoned them in Election 2008. And the party lost an opportunity to show they can work with, trust and treat other communities with equality and respect.

To be sure, the Umno annual general assembly this year is an event ahead of a possible general election next year. The party needs to rally its members. But it must also show that it can be a party acceptable to all Malaysians, not just the Malays

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