

**Transcript Of Interview With Najib In Conjunction With Umno General Assembly
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 26 (Bernama) -- The following is the transcript of the special interview by Bernama Saturday with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who is Umno president, in conjunction with the Umno General Assembly 2011.

QUESTION (Q): What will be the highlights of your message to party members against the backdrop of the political transformation which you have set in motion recently?

ANSWER (A): As a party, when a major challenge is looming, which is the general election, the party must be in a state of preparedness.

By that, I mean we should be prepared in a holistic and comprehensive manner either in terms of training, knowlegde, logistics or in terms of our mindset, our frame of mind, to focus on efforts which could strengthen our party, and to avoid engaging in acts that could weaken the party.

So it's incumbent that our approach must be able to create a strong front, we must close our ranks and we must show the kind of strength that will strike fear among our opponents.

Q: Can the call for preparedness be taken as putting the party in a war footing to face the 13th general election?

A: Yes, if we're to use war as an analogy, it means that before the first salvo is fired, our troops should have undergone training and preparations, in terms of the strategy and logistics, and equipment.

We should put all these properly in place in order to achieve victory which we all aspire.

Equally important are our fundamental values which will ensure that we can win in any war; the values of loyalty and allegiance, discipline, commitment in carrying out our duty, and teamwork.

All these are fundamental values which we must internalise and something which we must not compromise. Otherwise, our party will stand to lose in the areas concerned.

Q: If I could use as an analogy the Harimau Muda (Young Tigers) team which had remained resolute despite facing a sea of Indonesian supporters and stiff challenge (in the football final of the SEA Games in Jakarta last week)...

A: If we have the mental strength and if we are resolute, we'll be able to thrive in a very challenging environment even when our enemies are exerting pressure on us, including psychological and emotional pressure.

If we are determined and strong-willed, then, like what the Young Tigers have proven, we will be able to triumph over the immense pressure being heaped upon us; although it was not a level playing field in Jakarta, our team made it.

Q: Are you confident that the Young Tigers in Umno too are resolute in facing the challenges, especially in view of the increasing number of young voters in the next general election?

A: It has been proven in the by-elections that took place in the past two years that our victory since Bagan Pinang had involved young voters, we could see that the majority had supported us, meaning that young people shouldn't be equated with anti-establishment sentiments or not being supportive of the party that represents the government, namely the Barisan Nasional (BN). They'll evaluate who has a better understanding of their needs and aspirations as young people.

Q: In your opinion, have Umno Youth and Puteri movements been able to draw support from young voters who'll make up some 40 per cent of the total number of voters in the next general election?

A: We must approach this in a holistic manner because despite Umno Youth and Puteri wings being representatives of the younger generation, they still need the government's involvement in implementing what they're seeking on behalf of the younger generation.

For example, in our 1Malaysia People's Housing Scheme (PR1MA), we're doing away with the 10 per cent downpayment requirement, and we're pushing off the houses at reasonable prices with 100 per cent loans.

This had been put forward to the government by the BN Youth lab but they were not in the position to translate it into policy or programme.

The matter requires government participation, and the government of the day is mindful of the needs and demands of the younger generation.

I've been directly involved in programmes for young people myself although age is catching up with me...I feel young nonetheless (laughter). It goes to show that we must make adjustments when dealing with young people, which is also the case when it comes to women, senior citizens, middle-income group and others in society.

Q: Datuk Seri has reminded Umno members to avoid committing mistakes that may weaken the party. Why such reminder is needed?

A: We're in the position to list down things that may be detrimental to us.

All Umno members know what these are, but knowing doesn't mean eradicating the problems altogether.

We must demonstrate our commitment to make a little sacrifice without letting our feelings or personal agenda overweigh the interests of the party. It's one of the principles of being involved in a political party.

A party may have many members but what we need are those who understand what membership stands for, what the party's spirit, objectives and interests are. These are what we need to imbue the 3.4 million Umno members with.

Q: You want Umno members to be in a state of preparedness by organising training programmes and so on. Is that why the Umno general assembly is different this time

around, as the event is preceded by a forum and an international conference?

A: The (Wasatiyyah) forum is not specifically tailored for the general assembly. It is a means for us to project Umno's intellectual values as well as the role of Umno in the international context so that the world at large understands what Umno's struggle is about, especially what the party is championing today, like the National Transformation Plan and other initiatives.

Q: You have brought about much transformation ever since you started helming the party two and a half years ago. How much of the transformation process has been implemented by party members?

A: There have been changes, but I consider it as a journey actually. Because the biggest challenge is to change human beings, because, in the end, it's not a constitutional change (in the party) only, or changes to the structure or in the way the party conducts elections.

Ultimately, it depends on the attitude and values of our society, that's the most challenging.

Q: Datuk Seri did speak about sacrifice and also winnable candidates. So every time the elections come around, it becomes an issue for those holding positions and so on. How would Datuk Seri handle the rivalry between BN candidates in the coming general election?

A: We'll define what's a winnable candidate so that for each seat we're contesting, we'll try to put forward a candidate with the best chances of winning.

But we'll not just see the winnable candidate in terms of ability and track record but also in terms of acceptance by society, including the party machinery. If the party machinery rejects a person who has the ability, in the end he'll not succeed.

And, if we as party members are not open-minded and insist that the person must be a candidate based on hierarchy even though our candidate might not win, then what'll happen is that our candidate will fail.

Therefore, the term 'winnable candidate' must be understood. We must convince the party machinery to accept anyone we put forward, otherwise it'll be tough to succeed.

On the other hand, if the winnable candidate is put forth by a group within a certain division without considering the wishes of the majority of voters, that candidate too will fail.

Q: During the last general election, there were claims that candidate evaluations were not done in an organised manner. This time Datuk Seri keeps mentioning winnable candidates; can you share with us how the leadership would identify a winnable candidate?

A: We haven't finalised it yet (on candidates). We must do an objective evaluation, not just subjective. This is most important. The candidate we select need not be someone we like personally but someone who can be accepted by the majority of voters in a particular area. That's what we must do.

The question of deciding who can be a candidate is very challenging and difficult. It's impossible to please everybody. In my 35 years in politics, it has never happened in a general election (deciding on a candidate who satisfies everyone).

But whatever decision the party makes, ultimately we've to accept the party's decision as a

party member, even if it's not to our liking.

And I've experienced many episodes where I saw people loyal to the party accepting the party's decisions even though they didn't like it. So if we accept the decision, then that candidate will win.

But if they continue to object and say, 'come what may, I'll object', that means they're not loyal to the party and if the candidate loses, it means the party loses. They should realise that when the party loses, it means we'll lose power.

By right, what happened in the 2008 general election when we lost five states is a lesson we should never forget.

And we must realise the consequences of that loss. I'm not denying that sometimes we cannot please all our supporters at the divisional level, that's why I said earlier it's impossible for us to satisfy 100 per cent of the members in a division, as even at the divisional level they don't share the same views.

What we must have is party discipline and loyalty to the party. Meaning, when it's time to make the decision (candidate selection), it's accepted, supported and defended by each member of the party.

Q: It appears that the Malays, especially those in the cities, now do not see Umno as a party capable of safeguarding and enhancing their interests in the country. What is Datuk Seri's view on this?

A: This (attitude) is because of Maslow's theory (Hierarchy of Needs - Abraham Maslow). Because we (BN government) have succeeded in fulfilling the basic social needs of the people such as housing, electricity supply, water, roads, schools and employment. We've provided all that.

There's social mobility, information explosion, ICT revolution and so on because we've modernised our country.

It means that a large number of Malaysians have gone through the process of actualisation, whereby they've crossed the minimum demand level (hierarchy of needs). Thus they have plenty of room to raise various opinions. The variety of opinions is a sign of a more sophisticated and mature society.

For example, we can see in advanced democracies that there are various views and political spectrums. I consider Malaysia as no different from other countries in our journey towards becoming an advanced nation.

We would also see that differences in opinion are becoming a normal thing. But the fact is that the people should realise that the (country's) success all this time has been the result of Umno's struggle.

I'm not saying that they should feel thankful to us, because many would not be pleased if I say that.

What I want to say is that besides our track record and invaluable service, we still have plans for the future. What we can promise not only to Umno but the people of Malaysia is our guarantee, as in the past, that we're capable of implementing and fulfilling our promises

to the people.

Q: There are claims that the government, or Umno, has not done enough to assist the Malay community. What's your view on this?

A: This is not true. Although we promote the 1Malaysia slogan, we've never said that the Bumiputera agenda will be done away with. In fact, it's still the main agenda (of Umno) which is part of our national agenda.

What we've been doing for the other races is to do what is necessary by a government that's fair and one that upholds social justice.

For instance, when we say that we want to help the poor, even during the era of the New Economic Policy (NEP) we'd been talking about poverty eradication irrespective of race. That was the promise made in the 1970s.

Even today, we're still assisting the poor among the non-Bumiputeras or those in the low-income group. We've never backed down from the promise made by previous leaders.

So, let's not get confused or misunderstand this; the Bumiputera agenda will continue.

A case in point is the 'Bumiputera Economic Transformation: A Roadmap' document, a new initiative for the Bumiputeras, which I launched today. Meaning, we've never neglected or backed down from our struggle for the Bumiputeras.

Q: At the recent Social Media Convention, you mentioned about the attacks launched by the opposition against you, for instance, the one concerning your Haj pilgrimage and the claim that your family member had been on a spending spree in Australia while you were attending CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting). May we get your view on that, Datuk Seri?

A: One of the things that determines our fate in an election is the leadership of the prime minister and the president (of Umno), meaning, the main leader. So, if the opposition wants to weaken us, they'll think that they must attack me (as the main leader).

If they cannot attack our policies, they'll resort to character assassination. If they've no issues, they'll spin them, and if they've nothing to spin, they'll create falsehood.

This is how it goes; they think that in politics, everything is fair, including creating something out of nothing, and even when something is truthful, they'll try to undermine it until it becomes an untruth or half-truth.

For instance, when I performed the tawaf (during the recent Haj pilgrimage), they edited out other people (from the pictures) as though I had all the privileges, when in fact, that wasn't the case. I performed the tawaf together with other pilgrims.

When I went for CHOGM (last month), my daughter who was not in Australia, was said to have gone on a spending spree. These are lies and constitute character assassination; because they're so desperate, they're willing to do anything even if it's immoral and unethical.

Q: Let's talk about efforts to transform the country into a developed nation. How far, in your view, are the Malays ready to face drastic changes either in terms of economics, politics and

so on. Are they ready?

A: The Malays should prepare themselves; enhance their preparedness and ability to thrive in a fast-changing world, because if we don't change, but the world changes, what'll happen? We'll continue to be sidelined.

Is that what we want? Definitely not. So the government puts in place a transformation plan and if we embark on the path of change based on this plan, we won't be left behind; and we, as a race, will achieve progress.

Q: Datuk Seri, you mentioned just now that Malaysians are becoming more mature, including in politics, and based on the results of the 2008 general election, what are the steps you're taking to ensure that Umno and BN will continue to helm the government?

A: What we've been doing for the past two-and-a-half years is to convince the people that we listen to their needs. This is what I mean when I said that "the era of government knows best is over", and we must feel the heartbeat and pulse of the people.

With this in mind, we launched the GTP (Government Transformation Programme), ETP (Economic Transformation Programme) and the rural transformation programme. We'll continue with the Bumiputera agenda with new strategies and approach.

All this is done based on what we've been doing, that is gauging and listening to the needs of the people.

But the party, too, should embark on change and transformation at their respective levels. Party divisions and branches should reflect the new political culture, one that is not too engrossed in intra-politics, and one that also looks into the interests of communities outside the party so that they too support the party.

In the 70s and 80s, it would suffice for us to look only into party matters because people would automatically support Umno and BN, and no questions asked.

But in this era, if we want them to support us, they'll ask what we've done for them, what engagement we've had with them. This did not happen in the past; that's why I say times have changed.

If we're still in the old mode of thinking, we'll face the same fate as other old parties like the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party of Japan), Golkar (Indonesia) and Congress (Indian National Congress). These are parties which had struggled for independence, which had done a lot of good deeds.

But if we refuse to change and are oblivious to the fact that the political landscape has changed, then they might reject us.

This is what I want to say and this is the reason why there should be a sense of awareness among ourselves that in politics, there's no immunity. Politics has its own dynamics.

As party members, we must take cognisance of this landscape change and be brave to change. Since the 2008 general election, I was the (Umno) deputy president then, I've been saying that if we don't change, we'll be changed.

Q: In dealing with the challenge of championing the Bumiputera agenda, how do you

heighten the confidence of the Malays (in Umno)?

A: They must truly believe that there's no viable alternative to Umno (in safeguarding) the interests of the Malay and Bumiputera community, and we don't feel confident that by depending on others, they'll be able to fulfil the demands of the Malays and other members of society.

Q: What are your expectations of Umno delegates attending the general assembly?

A: The most important thing is that they must project to voters the image that Umno is a party that's willing to institute changes and one that's in tune with the people and will do the utmost for them. We've always stressed that the people come first. If we always keep this in mind, support for Umno will grow from strength to strength.

I hope that those tabling motions as well as speakers will not hurt the feelings of others. They should choose their words carefully, mindful that they will be watched not only by the 3,000 Umno delegates at the assembly but also 28 million Malaysians who will be following their speeches closely.

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