

Najib tells Umno to close ranks, prepare for 'war'
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 26 — Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak has called on his party to close ranks and prepare to go to polls ahead of next week's Umno general assembly, widely expected to be the last before the next general election.

In an interview with Bernama today, Najib (picture), who is also prime minister, said Umno must focus all its efforts on improving training, knowledge, logistics and the mindset of members to strengthen the party and ensure electoral victory.

"We should be prepared in a holistic and comprehensive manner, either in terms of training, knowledge, 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 is 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," he said, according to the full transcript of the interview on Bernama Online.

Likening the election to war, Najib said Umno must bolster its strategy, logistics and equipment well before even the first shot is fired.

He added that "fundamental values" like loyalty and allegiance, discipline, commitment and teamwork are also qualities that are needed to be fostered in the party ahead of elections.

"All these are fundamental values which we must internalise and which we must not compromise. Otherwise, our party will stand to lose in certain areas," he said.

Umno needs to have mental strength and fortitude if it wishes to endure the psychological and emotional stress when competing in enemy territory, Najib also said.

"If we are mentally resilient and our spirit is strong, we shall overcome... even if the playing field is not level, like in Jakarta," he said, drawing an analogy with the Malaysian football team's SEA Games success in Indonesia.

Najib desperately needs to win a two-thirds parliamentary majority in the next election to secure his mandate.

His government has moved aggressively into the opposition's Middle Malaysia fortress in recent months, armed with promises of greater freedoms and civil liberties.

To date, the prime minister has repealed three Emergency declarations, pledged to abolish the Internal Security Act (ISA), tabled the Peaceful Assembly Bill, set up the parliamentary select committee on electoral reform and given more leeway to university students to participate in politics.

But Najib is also keen to protect Umno's traditional Malay vote base even while conceding ground to moderates, and has introduced a raft of affirmative action policies to protect

Bumiputera special rights.

Najib assured in his Bernama interview that Umno has not abandoned the fight for Bumiputera rights, which remained a cornerstone of the party's policies.

"Even though we have the 1 Malaysia slogan, we have never said that the Bumiputera agenda is no more..."

"What we have done for the other races is what we have to do as a fair government founded on social justice," he said.

He pointed out Umno had not strayed from the promise of the New Economic Policy (NEP), instituted by his father in 1971, which promised to alleviate all poverty regardless of race.

"Let's not be confused or mistaken. We will carry on with our Bumiputera agenda," he said.

Earlier today, the prime minister announced a RM30 million endowment into a new private education trust fund for the country's largest ethnic grouping.

He also introduced a programme today offering Bumiputeras corporate shares as an incentive to grow their wealth.

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