

Excerpts Of Muhyiddin's News Conference In Conjunction With Umno General Assembly 2011

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Herewith is an excerpt of a special news conference by Deputy Prime Minister and Umno deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin in conjunction with the Umno General Assembly 2011 held at the Education Ministry in Putrajaya Friday.

QUESTION: This assembly may be regarded as the last before the 13th general election and the biggest as the number of delegates has increased. What is the focus of the assembly?

ANSWER: This will be a very important assembly. As we do not know when the general election will be held, this assembly, which is the largest gathering of the Malays, will not only attract the attention of the Malaysian community, the Malays in particular but also others at the international level as well.

Secondly, as this may be the assembly before the general election, whatever matters deliberated will get the attention, especially from Umno itself on whether we will be seen as a credible party, and a party that is said to be still relevant or otherwise to the Malays and the Malaysian struggle.

Of course, the focus and attention of the Malays themselves is whether Umno that is regarded to be the bastion of the Malays since its inception would still continue to make the struggle to defend the Malay community its most important foundation and whether this party had carried out the process of change or transformation after the 2008 general election.

In short, the discussion will be scrutinised by all levels of the Malay and non-Malay communities and it is also important whether after the assembly, a new consciousness of the Malays will arise out of Umno's important decisions.

Q: From previous experience, many issues discussed (at the general assembly) were also debated outside the hall and became public sentiment.

A: I see this format has not changed much even though the gathering is said to be a closed door assembly in the sense that those who participated in the debate are only selected delegates.

But the format, which had been used for the past seven to eight years allowed the participants who came from outside to follow the debate on the white screen placed outside the hall for their benefit.

This means that we are open in terms of what we debate on, there is nothing for us to hide as we have to be transparent even though it will touch on Malay interests, the future of the Malays. But we also must understand that the role of Umno, especially in government is important as we become the main party in the BN.

That is why when the delegates voice out whatever views they want, they must take into

account not only the question of safeguarding and protecting the interests of the Malays but also the interests of the other races.

So, to me this is a practice which we have started and we will continue to adopt. There is no restriction for them to listen outside and for the media to provide extensive coverage.

Q : The issues debated by the delegates each year are almost the same, among the main issues are internal problems and the Malay agenda.

A: I cannot predict what will be discussed, but I believe there will be some changes because we have implanted in their mind that the coming general election will not be the same. Different, and our preparation is not normal, it must be more than normal.

The way to handle the people's problems should not be looked at as in the past. We say why not support (us), we have long provided various facilities, the country progressed because of the BN and so on, this argument cannot be as in the past. We have to show a different approach, for example, in tackling the economic problems of the masses.

If we want to convince the rakyat, we cannot just say that I want to help, will assist in resolving the problems. We don't want to hear all this any more but want to know how (it is to be implemented), what is the proof. If it cannot be implemented, they will not believe us.

That is why there must always be sincerity in our answer to whatever issue that is raised. When we are sincere, people will see that there is no political deception in whatever we do except to help the rakyat.

Q: (Your) advice to the debaters.

A: They must be more professional, should have a greater understanding of the issues than usual and not to be rhetorical in their delivery, there must be an approach, new content and must be based on detailed data.

They must realise that they are not debating in front of 3-4 thousand delegates only, every word uttered is heard by millions of people outside, they are intellectuals, they are knowledgeable, they have information, we cannot underestimate their mind.

So, the reply to be given in the debate must be convincing, must carry out a lot of research and the reasons and proof given must be strong. : Certain quarters have claimed that Umno is becoming increasingly racist and Tan Sri is also becoming racist.

A: This is merely a perception. I have never changed my attitude and stance in the Malay struggle and that of Malaysians.

So, for me, if at all this notion has surfaced, it is the impression created by the opposition that we are now more chauvinistic.

The fact is, parties like the DAP are more Chinese chauvinistic. Who are unaware about Lim Kit Siang and Guan Eng's attitude in highlighting issues of concern to one race only.

Umno does not only address the interests of the Malays, as we carry out the Malay agenda that still has a long way to go in terms of achieving its goals.

So when we talk about Malay interests, it does not mean we are racist because the largest

group in the Malaysian society, whether you like it or not, is still Bumiputeras and Muslims.

And this large group is neglected and still feel they are not being championed. Further more certain leaders dare not raise this predicament as they are afraid of being labelled chauvinists or racists, so this has veered from the foundation of our struggle.

So this game is being played up by the opposition to make us appear as if we are race-driven, our party a racist party whereas they are more racist.

Q: In pursuing the Malay struggle and 1Malaysia, some people perceive that the struggle for Malay rights has somewhat been hampered.

A: I do not think so, because it is actually consistent with current needs to ensure continuity in the nation's struggle for survival and in this context, we cannot separate the Malay struggle and the struggle to uphold our nationhood and sovereignty.

And because of this, the concept encompasses solidarity among all races as we unite in our thoughts on how we want to develop the country in all fields. Our transparency, our fairness have been practised all this while and will continue in the future in the spirit of 1Malaysia.

So when we talk about this matter, it does not mean that we are ignoring the foundations in the formation of Umno to safeguard the Malays and Bumiputeras as the pillar of the country.

That may be the perception as we want to address the political landscape following post-2008 electoral tsunami. We must take into account the changes in the mindset of not only the Malays but also the Malaysian society.

So, Umno has to make adjustments so that we are not seen as backward or not in tune with current developments. But the basic struggle to defend the Malays has never been relegated to the backburner.

Q: So can The Malays and other races still rely on Umno?

A: The answer is yes.

Although I am a bit prejudiced because I am an Umno leader, I have vast political experience from the past till now.

I do not know if we can see another Malay party other than Umno that is able to champion the fate of the Malays.

For example, PKR is enduring a protracted political crisis, the image of its advisor and leader is tarnished... they are embroiled in issues that run into conflict with the interests of the Malays because they want to take a more open attitude in pursuing the Malay interests whereas the Malays still need to be championed.

PAS is in disarray, it has strayed from its path although it claimed to be an Islamic party. It is not an Islamic party but a party using the symbol of Islam.

But it has strayed from its basic struggles. From striving for an Islamic country to becoming a welfare country but it cannot even solve the dirty water in Kelantan and many other issues.

They compromise the Islamic principles because they want to be in collusion with the DAP. But they cannot jell together, for example, they cannot come to term on hudud.

To bank on Malay hopes in another party other than Umno will be a futile struggle.

So Umno must be aware that the Malays still need us but there are weaknesses that we must resolve.

Q. Many Umno leaders are busy talking about sabotage.

Is the problem that serious that so many leaders are talking about it?

A. In this regard, we look at the possibility that from past experience in the 2008 general election where, due to the dissatisfaction with the candidates fielded in certain constituencies, there was evidence of sabotage...some of them we have identified when we carried out a post-mortem in the past and as a result, we lost.

Our defeat was not due to the strength of the opposition but because there were internal problems in certain areas.

So, when we say do not sabotage, it means that the past experience should not be repeated especially because we consider the next general election as the "mother of all elections" because we have read and you, in the media, already know that the election scenario now is very different from past elections.

That's why one element that we take into account is the internal party factor.

The leadership factor in Umno, particularly at the divisional level, the role of the division head, the role of the deputy, the role of the Youth (wing), Wanita, Puteri are all being taken into account so that they understand.

If they don't realise the critical situation that we are facing, which is akin to being on a snow-covered peak from which we may slip to the point where we may never recover, because we have lost power.

So, when we say don't sabotage, it's not merely that, but also don't withdraw your support.

Even more than that, we want them to work hard especially in a bid to defend our political power and remain as the government of the day.

Q. Tun Dr Mahathir has said that it is still early to hold the general election and the Selangor Menteri Besar, on the other hand, has said that he would not dissolve the State Legislative Assembly before June 2012. What is the reason, are we (BN) not ready yet?

A : To say that we are not ready, I cannot say so because we, in a party like Umno or the BN, must always be ready all the time.

That's why at all levels, as party management (committee) chairman, I have already set up the election machinery and I have concluded my meetings with all component parties and from the reports, everyone already knows about the preparations that need to be done not only at the national level, state level but at the grassroots level too -- it has reached the ballot boxes of the polling district -- that is what we have prepared but whatever the

decision, whether ready or not, the yardstick will be decided by party president Datuk Seri Najib, as the Umno president will decide.

The question whether the states under the opposition pact want to have simultaneous elections or otherwise, this will depend on them. I have already read the statement by (Kelantan Menteri Besar) Nik (Abdul) Aziz (Nik Mat), in Kelantan who said that if there is a general election next year, he will also join in.

But it's different in Selangor and Penang. It means that on this matter, they have not reached a consensus, they don't know whether it will be to their advantage to have the election together or otherwise -- they don't know yet how to evaluate.

For us in the BN, we have held the elections (state and federal) together even from before. I don't take into consideration the statement by the EC (Election Commission) that they have to bear a higher cost (for separate elections).

If the State Legislative Assemblies are not dissolved when Parliament is dissolved, they have to face it because the Commission has been tasked with managing the election.

For us, whether they dissolve together or not, for me, we will face it. May be it's also good if they don't dissolve together or not, we already have the experience...so, they are afraid to dissolve together, at least if they lose the parliamentary election, they still have the state (assemblies) because the State Legislative Assemblies purportedly are not dissolved yet.

But for us, if we win Insyallah..there is time to focus if the state election is held later. So, we have no problem whether they want to have it simultaneously or otherwise. The matter is up to them.

Q: The way the opposition is facing the BN now appears as though the 13th general election would be the swan song for the BN?

A: I believe that they are deliberately doing it although they no longer trumpet the slogan "Jalan ke Putrajaya" (Road to Putrajaya), maybe because the way to it is becoming unclear as they know there is a change of attitude on the ground.

For example, when the PM and I go down on the ground, the response is spontaneous, and not pressured in drawing a large crowd.

This shows a new change, new attitude among many of the voters, Malays, non-Malays, so they (opposition) realise what is happening on the ground. So when they say that they want to take over and topple the BN, they know that they will face strong opposition from us.

We will not give up without a fight. People say that we will not only have to face the opposition with all the strength we have but also to explain to the people, as the final say lies with the rakyat.

We are taking the stand that the election will be the toughest one so that our mindset is ready -- I want to tell those at the grassroots not to take things easy. They (opposition) will go all out to defend the states under their rule. They won't give up easily in Penang, Selangor, Kelantan and Kedah as they will attempt to recapture places like Perak.

That's why I have been telling party colleagues that this will be an uphill battle.

That's why I'm always on the go, every day I go down to the ground to explain to the rakyat so that they will better understand the situation.

Q: The Youth, Puteri and Wanita wings are perceived to be not as active as before.

A: I agree on this and I believe that others also share this opinion. (Umno) President (Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak) himself has stated this in his special message to the party wings recently.

The assembly was held because we want them to realise that they have a greater role. But the view of outsiders with regard to the Youth and Puteri movements is that they are not up to expectations. We acknowledge this. They have not been able to effectively act in accordance with the aspirations of the younger generation.

I don't deny that they have implemented numerous programmes and activities.

That's why, in my opinion, the role and responsibility of the Youth and Puteri movements in this regard should be given more focus in the months to come, how we can enhance the role of young people in our party.

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