

2012 Sees Umno Continue To Be Strong Despite Tribulations

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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 25 (Bernama) -- 2012 sees Umno, the biggest political party in the country, continue to show its increasingly stable and strong position despite the many tribulations.

The loss of four states, namely Kelantan, Kedah, Penang and Selangor in the last general election in 2008, caused Umno, which has a membership of 3.3 million, to continue showing determination and a strong desire to win back two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, through the party's recent general assembly, rallied all Umno members to unite and defend Putrajaya while stressing that Malaysians deserved to get the best government, which only Umno and Barisan Nasional (BN) were capable of offering.

The prime minister said the 13th general election would be the deciding point to the nation's future direction, and the people must know how to evaluate BN's advantages over the opposition.

He said this was proven by the Alliance and then BN which was spearheaded by Umno since more than 55 years ago, which continuously led the government and brought about numerous changes and quantum leap reforms.

Najib, who is also BN chairman, vowed that he and the Umno leadership would continue to give priority to the welfare of the people, to raise the dignity of the Malays and to protect the faith of Muslims and sanctity of Islam.

Political observer Datuk Dr Kaisan Abdul Rahman said he was impressed by Umno's revival that it had come out stronger, braver and more transparent under Najib, who was showing firm leadership and respected by all members of the party and all Malaysians.

"The positive impact of Najib's firmness in heading Umno is also felt by Umno in Kelantan, which is becoming more confident of itself. In fact, the government transformation programme by Najib has touched the lives of all levels of society.

This is proof of a political party whose direction is clear and should get the solid support of the people," said the doctor who is from Kelantan.

Umno deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said Umno had recovered after the shock of the last general election, and it was now fully prepared in facing the 13th general election.

He said there were now obvious changes in terms of strength and unity in the party, plus the transformation process which benefited the people, implemented by the prime minister.

The effort of Umno to rejuvenate the party showed promising success when more than 70 per cent of the 250,000 visitors to the 66th Umno anniversary celebration at the grounds of the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil were youths.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor had said that the presence of many youths proved that the goal of Umno to lure the young to understand and appreciate

the struggle of the party had been achieved.

Najib at the recent general assembly also reminded party members that society was facing radical demographic changes which also changed tastes and aspirations, especially of the young who were more informed and critical.

The prime minister said priorities, tastes, the value system and the voter profile in Malaysia contributed to the changed political landscape following a higher standard of living, the urbanisation process, access to education, and advancement in information communication technology and transportation taking place in the country.

The Umno president also drew the attention of the delegates that since March 2008, there were 2.9 million new registered voters of all ages. He said the figure was very significant as it represented more than one-fifth of Malaysian voters who now numbered 13.1 million.

Behind Umno's fight against the odds, the party was not spared from numerous trials and tribulations, among which were the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) issue which was linked to Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, several members leaving Umno to join the opposition, and sabotage.

Umno was also accused of buying votes by an ex-party member and of having connections with communists, besides having to handle the apostasy issue and its destruction prayed for by an opposition party, which is purportedly fighting for Islam.

Umno is not weak, but has instead become stronger in taking steps and drawing up strategies to parry the misperceptions of certain quarters envious of its successes.

In March, when the NFC controversy was being churned up by opponents of Umno, its Wanita chief Shahrizat stepped down as cabinet minister, an action praised by Umno and BN.

Due to a controversial statement made by Kulim-Bandar Baharu Umno division secretary, Tan Sri Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, the party Disciplinary Board had to gather information and proof to debunk the claim that BN paid money to voters in the Kulim-Bandar Baharu parliamentary constituency in the last general election.

However, on March 19, the ex-information minister sent a letter of resignation as Umno member to the party's secretary-general and then joined a non-governmental organisation, Angkatan Amanah Merdeka (Amanah).

Umno was then tested by the statement of former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was of the opinion that the party was facing a problem of lack of highly qualified leaders, because their entry into Umno was blocked at the divisional and branch levels.

As such, he said, the divisional and branch leaders must open their doors as wide as possible for professionals and intellectuals to join the party and subsequently field them as candidates in the general election.

In May, the Umno president was heckled by certain individuals who created a commotion by shouting the word 'bersih' during an 'Evening with the Prime Minister' event attended by about 1,500 people during Najib's two-day working visit to the United Kingdom.

Behind the myriad of tribulations faced by Umno, its deputy president issued a stern warning that any Umno member or leader who sabotage candidates in the general election would be

sacked from the party.

In line with the strong warning issued by Muhyiddin, the Umno Supreme Council agreed to form a special committee to be chaired by Tan Sri Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen Tengku Ismail, who is also party Disciplinary Board chairman, to monitor and take immediate action against party members who betray or sabotage BN candidates.

The prime minister said that adherence to party discipline was among the deciding factors for Umno and BN's victory, although the party was becoming stronger in facing the general election.

Najib said that despite having a large membership, Umno, which is the main party of the Malays, might lose if the members did not have strong party discipline.

Regardless, the recent general assembly was the last and had given the signal that Umno was ready to face the general election. The party has risen again to be stronger, more disciplined, solid and capable of ensuring a better future for all Malaysians under BN.

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