

Despite reconciliatory handshake, grassroots say Umno's problems far from over
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The Umno general assembly yesterday appeared to end on a triumphant note for embattled party president Datuk Seri Najib Razak – delegates stood up and roared in approval as he wrapped up his final speech with cries that he would never surrender.

And after months of internal conflicts, he extended a [reconciliatory handshake](#) to one of his fiercest critics, deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who had experienced three days of public drubbing from the delegates during the main assembly.

But beneath the beaming smiles of the delegates captured on camera were deep concerns that the country's biggest and oldest Malay party still had a long way to go before it could fully heal.

Those The Malaysian Insider spoke to talked more about the need for the party leadership to unite rather than resolve issues that caused the cracks in the first place.

Pasir Panjang branch chief Ramli Aziz said the ultimate expectation delegates had for the assembly this year was for the top two party leaders to reconcile so that Umno could once again be strong and united.

Grandiose as it was, Ramli said the [handshake on stage fell flat](#) because Muhyiddin's heart was not in it.

"When Muhyiddin shook hands with Najib, it did not seem sincere. Usually Muhyiddin would accompany Najib and both would leave the assembly together," said Ramli.

"But this time Muhyiddin was among the first to leave and left separately from the rest. Najib was sincere but his deputy was not."

Sabah delegate Datuk Kamarlin Ombi was equally unhappy with the response from Najib's opponents, and said the party could never resolve its problems if the other side refused to cooperate.

All Kamarlin wanted was for the leaders to unite, and he urged "certain quarters" to self-reflect.

"Najib has explained that he is willing to talk, to resolve this conflict. Then I thought if he's the only one talking, while the other side doesn't cooperate, it will never be resolved," said Kamarlin.

Indeed, almost immediately after accepting Najib's handshake, Muhyiddin told the media he still wanted to know what steps Najib would take to [resolve the problems he raised](#), which centred around the alleged scandal involving 1Malaysia Development Berhad and the RM2.6 billion donation in the prime minister's personal bank accounts.

Teluk Kemang delegate Junaina Abu Kassim said she believed it would take time for the party to reconcile, saying that both sides needed to understand one another and admit to their mistakes.

Refusing to take sides, Junaina simply said all leaders must be brave to advise one another and accept criticism.

Meanwhile, Rushdan Mohamed, a Sepang Umno member, was unhappy with the gesture on stage as well as Najib's winding-up speech.

"You can't just solve everything with hugs and handshakes. Who's going to shake the people's hands, the voter's hands? How easy it is for him.

"His speech was no longer about the pulse of the people, but his own survival," said Rushdan.

He added that the party was [practising double standards](#) in punishing people, and urged the president to steer Umno to its original struggles.

A member from Perlis who wished only to be known as Syirah was equally underwhelmed by the president's speech.

"It's too short. President said we do not need to worry about the TPP agreement (Trans-Pacific Partnership) but I still am. I understand a little but I need more information."

However, she said she supported any decisions made by the president.

"I have been Umno member for 20 years. We support the party. This is about the Malays," she said.

But Sapari, a member from Pontian, Johor, and Che Hassann Che Johan of Seputeh Umno were satisfied with Najib's brief speech.

Sapari, a member of Umno for 40 years, said the fight between the leaders should stop as it would affect the party's chances of winning the next general election.

"His call for unity and to close rank among the leaders and members is at a right time as we need to work hard for the next general election," he said.

Che Hassan hailed the speech as a good beginning for the party's leadership, and interpreted the handshake on stage as a sign of the leaders all forgiving one another.

He also appeared to believe Najib's statement that none of the attacks against him were substantiated.

"I don't want anymore voices trying to tear the Umno leaders apart. I hope what happened today becomes a positive reality. We can see that unity has returned, and we must defend it.

"Our leaders have shown that they are politically mature," said Che Hassan.

But Kemaman Umno Youth Chief Fikri Ibrahim believed the reconciliation fell through, adding that he did not see this to be a problem.

"The way I see it, there may be reasons for why these issues were brought up in the first place because they are being talked about in public.

"There should have been more explanation on these issues to us." – December 13, 2015.

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