

The long, arduous road for Asri and new

By AZMI M. ANSHAH

KOTA BARU, Sun. — Datuk Asri Haji Muda has shown himself to be nothing if not a pragmatic and shrewd politician. But one wonders if the formation of his new Hisbul Muslimin (Hamin) is nothing more than an attempt by him to remain in politics even if only on the fringes.

The new party, launched by Datuk Asri here two weeks ago, has not only a long and arduous road ahead to gain credibility but is also much more dependent on the former PAS president than his former party ever was.

Take away Datuk Asri and Hisbul Muslimin becomes an empty shell — existing on paper and devoid of the grassroots support it so vitally needs.

Datuk Asri has warned that, it could take up to a year to get the necessary support for the new party to become a force in politics. But his perspective of reality may be clouded by emotions and his own optimism.

The recent Ulu Muda by-election showed that PAS, despite its internal strife, still has support at a grassroots level.

The party obtained enough votes to stump the Barisan Nasional's boast that PAS' Ustaz Nakhaie Ahmad would lose his deposit.

The PAS leaders were quick to point out that the



Datuk Asri ... it could gain support

result showed Datuk Asri and his allies had hardly made any dent in PAS ranks.

The "Gang of 13" on whom the new PAS leadership took disciplinary action and who form the backbone of Hisbul Muslimin — had staged several rallies to take their cause to the people.

The result? A disappointing turnout at almost every rally composed mainly of the curious, the bored, and "spies" from other Muslim political parties.

This gave reason to believe that the party had turned out to be a still-born party.

But when PAS stalwarts like Majlis Ulamak (Reli-

Nik Aziz Nik Mat organised a rally, the faithful turned up by the thousands.

Apart from the herculean task of gathering support for the new party,

Datuk Asri also has to overcome the accusations that another Muslim based party would only split the Malays.

The Umno-PAS political struggle with its religious overtones has caused a split that is of national concern. The recent amendments to the Penal Code to check those who misused religion means that the Government viewed this as a serious security threat.

Although Datuk Asri was ousted from PAS on charges of being "more of a nationalist than an Islamic fundamentalist," it is also true that PAS' brand of Islam during his tenure was described by Umno leaders as "deviationist".

It is clear that Datuk Asri Hisbul Muslimin is aimed more at draining the membership from PAS than cutting in on Umno's territory. The question is whether his brand of politics can attract this support.

Datuk Asri's style of politics has to overcome the emotionalism of PAS appeal to the Malays if he is to attract support.

Whether he can do this, and at the same time stand above the charges of adding to Malay disunity, remains to be seen.

climate, it looks very unlikely that Datuk Asri and Hisbul Muslimin can command enough national support to undermine the new PAS leadership.

Datuk Asri is also watching and awaiting developments as PAS moves nearer to its general assembly later this month when party elections will be held.

Considering that two of his staunch allies — Datuk Abu Bakar Umar and Datuk Sudin Wahab — were not named in the His-

committee members, it is not entirely improbable that they will mount a challenge for the PAS presidency and deputy presidency in the general assembly.

This is provided, of course, that they are not expelled or suspended from PAS before that.

If the challenge takes place, Datuk Asri will be using all the influence and

to him from those still in the party to back Datuk Abu Bakar and Datuk Sudin.

If the challengers win, Datuk Asri has not only outmanoeuvred, the PAS leadership but also means that his influence in the party has remained high.

In the more probable event of the challengers los-

lieve that Hisbul Muslimin the year he wants to build up his new party that could be nothing more than a mosque party sniping from the sidelines. Religious Council)