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Pas-Unification (News Focus)

THE PATH TO MALAY UNITY FILLED WITH OBSTACLES

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KOTA BAHARU, Oct 6 (Bernama) -- The path to the unification of the Malays and Islam under one roof through Umno, particularly in Kelantan, may not be as smooth sailing as envisaged by the country's leadership.

Pas' decision to reject the unification was manifested through the mammoth gathering called "Perhimpunan Amanat Tok Guru" at the Sultan Muhammad IV Stadium here on Friday night.

What is more surprising is that the response to the gathering which could be construed as one that was held to challenge the Semangat 46 (S46)-Umno Malay Unity gathering a day earlier, was overwhelming.

Whether the number of people who flocked to the stadium is a true reflection of the support of the people of Kelantan for the Pas-led state government, what is certain is that the stadium which can easily accommodate 40,000 people, was packed while thousands more had to wait outside the stadium.

According to observers, if the attendance could be used as a yardstick, it is then apparent that Pas supporters are still obsessed with the "Khalifah" and his cause even to the extent that they would shut their heart to the appeal by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad (during the Malay Unity gathering) to Pas leaders and supporters join Umno.

The Umno president's sincerity in making the call was reflected through his speech when he said: "It would be blissful if the leaders and supporters of Pas could be together with us in this gathering for the sake of a greater Malay unity."

Unfortunately, Pas displayed its arrogance when party president Haji Fadzil Noor cynically invited Umno members to join Pas instead.

Observers say it does not make any sense for a big grouping like Umno to be dissolved so that its members can join a far smaller group, especially when Umno has been recognised as the largest Islamic party in the world.

Despite this, observers believe that the support shown at the Pas gathering is only temporary and sooner or later the people of Kelantan will accept the fact that their obsession towards Pas and its leaders will not guarantee them a better future.

They attributed the support to two factors -- the sympathy towards Kelantan Menteri Besar who is also the "Mursyid Am" of Pas Datuk Haji Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and their (Pas supporters) anger over what they describe as a treacherous act by S46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Since the 1990 general election, Pas and S46 had cooperated and shared power in Kelantan through the Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah coalition which also included Berjasa dan Hamim.

However, Tengku Razaleigh chose to dissolve his party and bring his members to join Umno for the sake of Malay unity. The Thursday gathering here has been described as the turning point to the unity.

Pas supporters sympathise with Nik Aziz apparently because the efforts by the "Tok Guru" to develop Kelantan smoothly according to the policy of the party had met with resistance and pressure from various quarters including Umno, S46 and the Kelantan palace.

Observers say that in a conservative Islamic society, any attempt which could be construed as "disturbing" the "Tok Guru" institution would surely be negatively received although some quarters cast doubt about his ability in political and administrative matters in this modern age.

On Tengku Razaleigh, it may take some time for Pas supporters to realise his rationale in dissolving S46 and joining Umno.

Pas apparently is upset with Tengku Razaleigh because the former Finance Minister was the one who was very keen to cooperate with Pas to the extent that he was willing to accept Islamic principles or "ad-din" as fundamentals in the coalition's political struggle.

The illfeelings of a group of S46 supporters against Tengku Razaleigh was mainly influenced by the environment of living in a village because "all of a sudden they were invited to be good with their Umno neighbours after eight years of animosity."

Based on this scenario, observers felt that Umno and Tengku Razaleigh in particular have to work harder to win the hearts and minds of the S46 supporters who reject the crossover.

Until then, the path for Umno in this state would still be filled with obstacles and taking into account the present situation, Kelantan Umno can still be considered as the underdog that needs some time before it can plan to bring down Pas through the democratic process. -- BERNAMA

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