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Pas leaders prepare for early polls, hoping to cash in on economic woes

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WHILE the country deals with the current economic problem, Pas leaders and delegates are preparing for the next general election, which they predict will be held some time next year.

Leaders and delegates who attended the party's recent general assembly spoke at length on the subject, urging the members to make the necessary preparations as Pas believes it stood to gain from the general election, largely due to the economic problem.

To some leaders and delegates, the party is likely to fare better this time around. The economic problem, according to them, has caused hardship to the people. Thus, they feel voters are likely to register their frustration by voting for opposition parties, including Pas.

Delegates who took part in the debates, urged the party leadership to draw up effective election strategies and criteria for the selection of candidates and beefing up the party administration at all levels.

From day one of the general assembly (held from May 15 to 17), Pas delegates appeared confident that they can deny the Barisan Nasional a two-third majority.

Even the Muslimat (women) delegates who took part in the debate on the presidential address, urged the men delegates to allow their wives to attend party activities, especially in helping the party to garner more votes.

Pas leaders, including its president, Datuk Fadzil Mohd Noor, and his deputy, Abdul Hadi Awang, feel that with the current economic problem the party could get the support of the people.

The delegates also wanted the Government to address the economic problem quickly and, at the same time, warned against the use of public funds to bail out companies.

An unexpected criticism against the labour movement in the country came from the Pas president who expressed his surprise over the failure of the movement to criticise the Government in its handling of the economic problem.

Fadzil's keynote address also stressed on unity among members as the key factor which would enable the party to perform better than in the last general election.

Although Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has until 2000 to call for a general election, Pas leaders feel confident the election would be held sooner. Some Pas delegates and leaders even predicted that the general election would be held before April next year.

Although most delegates felt that the party was heading towards a bigger victory, there were also those who expressed fear about being over-confident.

The message is not a mere reminder. According to Pas leaders there are individuals who have their own agenda and out to create factions in the party.

There are also individuals whom Pas leaders know are a threat to party unity.

Abdul Hadi, opening the Pas Youth assembly, raised his concern over the presence of Shi'ite followers in the party. He urged them to quit Pas, failing which they would be expelled.

He said the party expelled 12 Shi'ite followers last month.

Outspoken Pas leader Mohamed Sabu reminded the party leadership and

delegates of the view expressed by sociologists that Malays tend to stick closer to the Government when they are facing problems.

He added that if that was true, Pas would find it even more difficult to attract voters to support the party.

Some delegates also raised concern over the inability of some States to generate enough support from the people. They argued that some Pas offices were inadequately staffed and lacked professionals.

They also urged Pas members to link up with various non-governmental organisations, parent-teacher associations, mosque committees and other organisations.

Despite all the fiery speeches, the party itself has a lot of cleaning up to do, particularly in improving its administration and getting the people to support it.

There were delegates who reminded the party of the importance of establishing ties with the Chinese community if they wanted to win the election.

A delegate pointed out that Pas would face difficulties in the election if it attempted only to woo votes from one particular race in multi-racial Malaysia.

Even the Pas victory in Kelantan was described by one delegate as shallow as the State Government under Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat does not have full control over the State administration.

But whatever is said and done, the party's aspiration to be well represented in the next Parliament will be determined by its ability to persuade the people into believing the party can be the alternative to the Barisan Nasional.

However, such efforts will not be easy if Pas insists on going alone in the general election.

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