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Focus-Keadilan

KEADILAN: NO THREAT TO RULING BN COALITION

By: Ali Mamat

KUALA LUMPUR: The birth the new political party Parti Keadilan Nasional under the leadership of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, does not seem to upset Umno or the Barisan Nasional leaders and members.

The BN leaders generally viewed Keadilan, at a time when the next polls is in the air, as nothing more than a platform for Anwar's supporters to release their anger and vengeance against the ruling National Front's leaders, particularly in the person of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Some viewed the party as a retaliation to Dr Mahathir's sacking of Anwar from the post of Deputy Prime Minister on September 2 last year, followed by his arrest and detention on September 20 and finally his six years' imprisonment upon conviction of four corruption charges on April 14.

An Umno veteran, Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, said he is confident that Keadilan would not cause any serious damage to Umno or the BN component parties, nor would it have the capability to topple the ruling coalition, even with an electoral pact with the existing opposition parties.

Wan Mokhtar who is the Menteri Besar of Terengganu, said his confidence is based on past experiences where almost all splinter parties of Umno, or even PAS, performed miserably and died a natural death, or deserted by their leaders and supporters.

Wan Mokhtar should know because he has been in national politics long enough to witness the ups and downs of Umno and its leaders and the emergence and demise of several Umno or PAS' splinter parties.

According to him, Parti Negara could only survive for a few years in the late 50s, despite the fact that it was formed and led by the founder of Umno himself, Datuk Onn Jaafar.

Parti Berjasa and Hamim which were formed by former PAS leaders, Datuk Muhammad Nasir and Tan Sri Mohd Asri Muda, between 1977 and 1982, respectively, also suffered a similar fate and they now exist only on papers.

Similar fate also befell two other PAS' breakaway parties, the Islamic Justice Movement of Malaysia (AKIM) and Islah, formed on the eve of 1982 and 1990 general election, respectively.

Another Umno's splinter party which suffered the same fate was Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46), which was formed a few months before the 1990 general election. It was led by no less than an influential and experienced leader, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who was also a former Finance Minister.

Although the party did contribute to the downfall of the BN government in Kelantan and the victory of several PAS candidates in some other states in the 1990 election, Tengku Razaleigh decided to dissolve S46 in October 1996 upon realising that the party could not spread its wing any further beyond his own stronghold of Kelantan. It had performed poorly in the 1995 election.

Tengku Razaleigh and most of his followers are now back in Umno.

"History shows that the majority of the Malaysian citizens, particularly the Malays, are not very interested with the presence of other alternative parties aside from Umno or to some extent, PAS," Wan Mokhtar said.

He argued that if Tengku Razaleigh who took along with him several leading Umno leaders and thousands of supporters failed to unseat the BN,

it would definitely be much tougher for Wan Azizah and his Keadilan party to do any better.

Wan Mokhtar's analysis on the future of Keadilan is supported by Tengku Razaleigh who feels that in the absence of politically experienced leaders and devoid of grassroots support, the new party would not make much headway.

When he decided to form S46, Tengku Razaleigh not only had the support of the country's founding father Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra and former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn, but he also had leaders like Datuk Dr Rais Yatim (former Foreign Minister), Datuk Harun Idris (former Menteri Besar of Selangor), Datuk Suhaimi Kamaruddin (former Umno Youth chief), Datuk Manan Othman (former Minister of Agriculture), Datuk Radzi Sheikh Ahmad (former Deputy Minister of Primary Industries), Haji Ibrahim Azmi (former Kuala Nerus MP), Hajah Marina Yusof (former Umno Supreme Council member) and Datuk Zakaria Abdul Rahman (former Deputy Minister of Labour).

Wan Mokhtar is also doubtful over the claim that Keadilan is a multi-racial party which represents the country's diverse interest because its birth was strictly influenced by pressure from a handful of Anwar's supporters who wanted to revive his political career.

Wan Mokhtar concurs with Tengku Razaleigh that managing a political party is a tough job, especially when it is not established on a firm and sound foundation.

"It is just like building a house. It will not last very long if it sits on a sago palm stilts," he said, noting that Keadilan was born out of anger and vengeance.

In contrast, he said, Umno was built on a solid foundation with pragmatic agendas, incorporating the vital aspects of religion, race and motherland.

Wan Mokhtar also doubted the ability of the opposition election pact spearheaded by Keadilan to last because of their principle and ideological differences and the "non-compromise" stance adopted by PAS in its struggle to transform Malaysia into an Islamic state.

Based on the prevailing scenario, most analysts agreed with Wan Mokhtar and Tengku Razaleigh, and felt that the emergence of Keadilan would only serve to benefit BN because it would further split the opposition votes during the coming election.

The scenario would only change if Keadilan and the other opposition parties such as DAP, PRM and PBS were ready to accept PAS' ideology and struggle to make the country as Islamic state, an option which many thought would not materialise.

Without PAS, Keadilan would suffer the same fate as Parti Negara, Berjasa, Hamim, Akim and S46.

The big question now is whether PAS is willing to collaborate once again with another Umno's splinter party, after the bitter experience of being deserted by S46, its "bed partner" through the so-called Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah during their short honeymoon from 1990 to 1996. -- Bernama

AM KGO