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Umno-Opposition (Analysis)

UMNO INTENSIFIES FIGHT AGAINST PAS TACTICS

By: Ahmad Fuad Yahya

KUALA LUMPUR, June 18 (Bernama) -- Umno today sent a clear signal to PAS that it will no longer tolerate the opposition party's actions in belittling Umno's struggles to uphold Islam and in making use of the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim issue to garner support.

A majority of the delegates who spoke at the Umno General Assembly issued strong warnings on the danger facing Muslims if PAS was allowed to make use of religion for its political interest.

Looking at the spirit of the speakers and the response from the floor, it can be said that Anwar's expulsion has not affected unity among Umno's 2.8 million members and that the party is increasingly confident of putting a stop to PAS' attacks against it.

The speakers were debating party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's policy speech which contained a clear and bold explanation on Anwar's expulsion.

The explanation has made Umno members more confident in dealing with the people confused by PAS' exploitation of the issue.

If previously Umno members preferred to be silent on the Anwar issue, they now bravely speak about it and do not wish to allow PAS use the issue for political gains.

The delegates' strong criticism of Shanon Ahmad's controversial novel "Shit" is a sign that Umno is not prepared to see Dr Mahathir insulted by the national literary figure, who is also a PAS member.

The delegates are angry with Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, chairman of the PAS council of scholars, for defending the book.

If the anger against PAS expressed by Kedah delegate Datuk Badruddin Amiruddin is reflective of the general feelings in Umno, then PAS must get ready to face the Umno onslaught.

Badruddin called on Umno members to stand up and defend the dignity of the party's leaders who had been ridiculed and insulted by opposition parties.

He told the members that if they believed that the Umno Supreme Council's decision to expel Anwar was right they should defend the decision and not allow PAS to exploit it.

And judging from the members' response to the statement, it appears that PAS may no longer be able to make use of the issue to fish for votes.

The stress by Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, when opening the assemblies of the party's women's and youth wings yesterday, that Umno upholds Islam gives the delegates renewed confidence.

PAS also came under attack for its claim that it was more Islamic than Umno.

"Umno develops Islam very much more and is clearly more Islamic whereas PAS, contrary to its claim of being more Islamic, has accepted slander and legitimised vulgarity," said Federal Territory delegate Ridzuan Abdul Hamid.

Many delegates questioned PAS' move to cooperate with non-Muslim opposition parties now after having previously labelled Umno as infidel for cooperating with other Barisan Nasional component parties.

Outside the assembly hall, there was unusual interest in the proceedings through closed-circuit television from various observers although there are no party elections this year.

Perhaps they came to hear the "surprise" that Dr Mahathir was expected

to announce but did not, but what is certain is that PAS will be getting some surprises from Umno.

-- BERNAMA

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