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Convention agenda clear: Strengthen Malay support for Umno

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SOME 700 selected Malays, mostly Umno leaders at division level, are attending the two-day Kedah Umno Convention in Alor Star since yesterday.

Although some in the group are not party members, the agenda is clear - to strengthen Malay support for Umno.

Taking centre stage during the discussions are issues concerning the eroded support for the party in the last general election and the fear that the younger generation can no longer identify themselves with Umno.

The expectations from the participants are thus very high especially with the convention's theme of Umno Perjuangan Orang Melayu (Umno, the Malay struggle).

Participants therefore will have to find ways "to make Umno the only party for the Malays" and woo back support which had gone to Pas, a growing Malay-based party.

However, a woman participant who is among 16 from the Alor Star Umno division attending the convention obviously does not fully understand her role.

"The letter sent to me said the convention will relate to the struggles of former and present party leaders.

"I'll sit and listen, probably they will tell us about the Sauk incident," was her answer when asked on her expectations.

She is, of course, not the only one feeling blur.

The participants are playing pivotal roles here, charting the direction of Umno in Kedah in the next couple of years and towards wresting seats which had been lost to Pas.

They must understand this responsibility well or the convention will fail to meet its objectives.

For the mere fact that Pas recently declared Kedah as its next target after successfully taking over Kelantan and Trengganu, has made this convention more significant than those held previously.

What more, it is also the first concerted effort by the State Umno led by Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain to work out plans to counter Pas' advances.

What transpires during the two days will be keenly followed not only by members and supporters of Umno in Kedah but the opposition parties as well.

And talking about seriousness, Syed Razak certainly does not take things lightly.

Members of the various committees set up to organise the convention worked till the wee hours to perfect things.

Party flags and bunting hang along the main roads in town, giving more of a celebrative mood than anything else.

A grand welcoming ceremony also awaits Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will open the convention today.

It is learned that the State Umno had also formed a special committee to draft Syed Razak's key-note address at the convention.

All these speak of the excitement over the whole affair. Let's just hope the hardwork will not stop just there.

A comprehensive design to win back seats lost to Pas in the last general election must materialise from the convention.

Former Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff said the convention is not a fault-finding forum but more to discuss measures which Umno should take to win back support.

"We are here to examine ourselves and our strength and whatever is decided should be for the betterment of the Malay race," he said.

Sharing Osman's views is Ramli Mohd Yunus, a committee member of Pokok Sena division. He said those selected to participate in the various brain storming sessions just got to be honest and brave in giving their views no matter how sensitive they might be.

"This is the only way for Umno to carry out self-examination," he said.

Many Umno leaders in the State have accepted the fact that Umno is no longer the party for the Malays in Kedah.

The party has lost its credibility not because of Pas' increasing strength. It is the internal bickerings and the ability of Pas and its other allies in the Opposition Front to capitalise on issues like the sacking of jailed former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim during the general election that are responsible for Umno's poor performance.

"Pas won seats not because the party is strong but because of the internal bickerings in Umno and also because Umno members are too complacent," said Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob during his recent visit to Kedah.

Khalil also admitted that Umno members were still in the daze over the loss of seats.

"Many are trying to get over the defeat," he said when addressing participants of the Baling Umno division convention on July 8.

Pas is already walking tall in Kedah after wresting eight out of 15 parliamentary seats and increasing its state seats from a mere two to 12.

Political observers said Umno cannot deny that Pas parliamentarians and assemblymen are making tireless efforts to woo Umno's supporters and members to their side.

All these are demoralising Umno members, they said. The party leadership at the State-level must get cracking to fire the spirit of members and outline strategies to counter Pas before it become too late.

Five workshops - on politics, economy, religion, social, education were chaired among others by figures like Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, Datuk Abdul Khadir Sheikh Fadzir and Datuk Hishamuddin Tun Hussein last night.

The resolutions of these workshops are to be tabled this afternoon before Syed Razak make a summary on the convention and provide answers to issues that had been raised.

These two days provide opportunities for members to give the much needed inputs towards achieving this end.

The forum should not be put to waste.

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