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Kedah divisions expected to follow the trend set by Sik

ALOR STAR, Tues. - The constant reminder to heed the Umno supreme council's advice to have no contest for the party's top two posts seems to have yielded results among the 15 divisions in Kedah.

There were earlier rumblings that some divisions may opt to disregard the advice and instead nominate Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah for the post of either president or deputy president.

But at this stage, this does not seem likely.

The first division in the State to hold its meeting, Sik, today nominated Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for president and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for deputy president.

The division is headed by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Paduka Dr Abdul Hamid Othman.

Sik was the focus of attention, and political observers believe that the trend has been set and it will be very difficult for other divisions to make anything but a "standard nomination".

Moreover, the "Umno-friendly" campaign by the new State Umno liaison committee chief Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain to restore confidence in all divisions is expected to work against the Kelantan prince.

"His approach of going down to meet the grassroot will take away all restlessness and uneasiness. The members are expected to close ranks soon and work towards preserving party unity," a party observer said.

So far, indications are strong that all 15 divisions will reaffirm Dr Mahathir and Abdullah as the candidates for the top two slots.

Syed Razak, who met the Padang Terap division committee on Saturday, was quick to point out that all division leaders who were sidelined or lost in the recent elections still have a place in the party.

"They are potential candidates in the next election and I will stand by this as long as I am the Menteri Besar," he said.

"Now that the members have been reassured that their leaders will stay, why should they go for a new team at the top?" a delegate said.

Recalling the trend in 1987 (when Tengku Razaleigh took on Dr Mahathir for the Umno presidency), a Kedah Umno leader said all the then 14 divisions in Kedah had nominated Dr Mahathir while 13 nominated Tun Ghafar Baba for the deputy president post.

Only Kulim/Bandar Baru division proposed Tan Sri Musa Hitam, the then running mate of Tengku Razaleigh for the number two post.

Kubang Pasu Wanita chief Barishah Saad said it would be very difficult not to heed the supreme council's advice because there had been a renewed effort for the party to revitalise itself.

"For once, everybody in Umno has awakened from a slumber. They look for a leader to pull them through and who else can they turn to?" she said.

She said Umno could not afford to go through the process of searching for a new leader at the moment because the current leadership had done an excellent job for the country and the Malays.

Pandang division chief Datuk Othman Abdul is one leader in support of the move to nominate Tengku Razaleigh for the post of vice-president. "I do not know whether he will accept it, but that will be a move in the right direction to restore unity in Umno," he added.

The fact that Tengku Razaleigh's men "failed" to make their rounds or their presence felt in Kedah shows that they too do not expect much from the divisions.

After all, Tengku Razaleigh has never had much influence in Kedah as reflected in the fact that Semangat 46, the party he led then, failed to make any headway in the State during the 1990 and 1995 general elections. "It is obvious that things have not changed much," summed up an observer when commenting on the Tengku Razaleigh factor.

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