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Kedah Umno convention marks fresh counter-offensive against Pas

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AFTER much pomp and pageantry at its launching, the much-awaited Kedah Umno convention passed without much impact, that is, if opinions from grassroots members and leaders are taken into consideration.

The participants were not focussed in addressing pressing issues threatening Umno in the State and the resolutions passed reflected the real state of affairs - Kedah Umno still does not know which direction to take to counter Pas' threats.

Perhaps, this is what happens when State leaders who are supposed to take the lead only make their presence felt at the opening ceremony officiated by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The plenary session ended with fewer than 200 people, mostly invited participants from government departments and agencies, when some 2,000 were supposed to take part.

Several party leaders are disappointed with the way things turned out.

"We discussed the resolutions and agreed the standard befitted a branch meeting. There is very little that can be translated into an action plan," said a Youth leader.

He said the objective of finding input that could be formulated into policies that could provide at least a guideline towards a comprehensive action plan had not been achieved.

In his keynote address and welcoming speech at the opening of the convention, Menteri Besar Datuk Syed Razak Syed Zain repeatedly called on Umno members to close ranks and mend the rift between them.

Stressing unity as being the key to Umno's future success, the State Umno liaison committee chairman warned members to check the problem quickly.

"A strong house, if allowed to rot from within, will eventually collapse," he warned.

The convention instead became a forum where mainly only ideas were given.

Former State Umno Youth leader Ismail Tayib who is from Jerlun division said issues were not properly addressed and it was an anti-climax ending although some participants of the workshop on politics did give good input.

A participant had also pointed out that the vital issue of Umno's eroding support, which was stressed by Syed Razak, was not deliberated at length at the political workshop.

When asked what went wrong and whether the participants did not understand the message to be pondered, Md Rozai Shapian, Ayer Puteh Assemblyman and former Kedah liaison committee secretary, said: "I think they did not have enough time to study or digest the message the Menteri Besar had put across."

We understand the participants were running on a tight schedule, having to rush to attend the respective workshops after the keynote address was delivered.

But being a selected lot entrusted with a huge responsibility to demonstrate Umno's relevancy to the Malays, this excuse is not acceptable.

Although resolutions on politics acknowledged the need to continuously educate members through the party machinery and local dailies, some resolutions were mere rhetoric.

However, a few strong points did emerge from the convention which could

turn out to be the decisive factor to bring back the lost support.

The proposal to allocate RM1 million for the divisions to carry out their activities and to identify the financial resources will work to Umno's favour.

It was no secret that most of the divisions had complained of not having enough financial resources for their election machinery and this proposal, if implemented, will boost the spirits of its members to work harder.

"Pas was using computers to register their voters while Umno was still doing it manually ... Umno can do the same if the divisions have money to buy their own computers," an observer pointed out.

The call to reduce politicking among members and for divisional elections to be carried out once every three years, in the same year as supreme council elections, also augurs well for the state party's unity.

There were also calls for the election machinery at the district level to be activated at all times, to study weaknesses in strategies of the last general election, for candidates to be made known earlier and for the setting up of a special committee to monitor Opposition campaigns and activities and to counter them.

The convention agreed that to bring back Umno's strength, leaders should be models and that the party's struggles must not be influenced by material gains.

It was also agreed that the top party leadership should have scheduled meetings with leaders at lower levels.

It is now a question of implementation, a matter of concern to members and leaders.

Syed Razak had promised to implement them as soon as possible, including cutting red tape where there is a need to, but he said that some of the proposals would have to be sent "higher up" to reflect national unity and a uniform implementation.

However, both the grassroots and leaders alike agreed that the convention marked fresh counter-offensives against Pas which has made no secret of its intention to capture the State in the next election.

Perhaps, this is the momentum that the State Umno leadership and its 270,000 members have been waiting for.

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