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Boost for new Pahang Umno Youth chief and his team

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ISMAIL Muhamed Said, the newly-appointed Pahang Umno Youth chief, and his committee received a boost recently when the Umno Youth picked Kampung Pasir Bayam in Raub as the venue for the launch of the movement's welfare programme for students of higher learning institutions.

National Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and several of the movement's executive council members were there during the ceremony on Aug 16.

The programme is part of the movement's community projects to bring it closer to the grassroots.

Ismail needs all the support he can get because the ride to the next general election in 2004 will be rough.

He knows only too well that Pas, after winning an unprecedented six Pahang State seats in the 1999 general election, is eyeing Pahang. This 36-year-old lawyer also knows that he has an unenviable task.

His priority is to get things organised and his experience as secretary of Mentakab Umno and the BN between 1998 and 2001 will come in handy.

Ismail was very much in the picture during the Sanggang by-election in April, 2000 which saw how Pas, buoyed by their achievement in the 1999 general election, made a strong bid for the seat.

The by-election was called following the death of the incumbent Datuk Abdullah Kia. The Mentakab division even proposed his name among potential candidates before the leadership decided on Redzwan Harun, who later defeated Datuk Hishammuddin Yahya in the straight fight.

"As long as we remain focused, there should be no problem," said the Mentakab Umno chief who succeeded Mohd Sharkar Shamsuddin who was elected the division's deputy chief.

Ismail said the social structure in Pahang was quite complexed as the people comprised residents of traditional villages, Felde settlements, fishing villages and urban areas.

He estimated that only 40 per cent of Felde community in the State were Government supporters while the rest were with the Opposition, either as members or sympathisers.

"This, we have to overcome fast before the situation worsens. Umno has to focus on Malay-majority areas because they are the target of the Opposition.

"In Felde settlements, the needs of the second generation have to be looked into. Many have lost their sense of direction in life. We will go to this group and ensure that their interest will be protected."

Ismail said the State Umno Youth, during its first meeting on July 27, had formed the Felde and Rural Development Affairs.

"We want them to feel our presence. We will organise activities and programmes so that their free time will be occupied. We want to disassociate Felde youths with social ills like illegal racing and drug abuse," he said.

Another major project that Ismail has initiated is the Angkatan Muda Dakwah, in which three youth members from each of the Umno branches in the State will be groomed to be "imam muda".

"We will have 2,000 members who will be in the forefront during religious activities. They will lead the "tahlil" prayers and perform "mandi jenazah" (religious rituals for the dead)," he said.

He said Umno was not short of members who were knowledgeable in Islam,

so these tasks should not be left to others to monopolise.

"We should not turn down requests to lead the congregations during prayers.

"Through this, we will be very much involved in the religious affairs of villagers. Not only will they be involved in welfare activities, they will also make the people aware of the political game that Pas is playing," he said.

Ismail said the people must be made aware that Umno too was committed in its struggle for Islam.

"As the group which will inherit the leadership, I want to make sure that Umno Youth members are knowledgeable in true teachings Islam".

Ismail added that the State Umno Youth would strive to fulfil the hope of party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that the movement remained as the party's backbone.

"Efforts are being made to recruit new members, register them as voters and also open our operation rooms for members to carry out their activities," he said.

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