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Hishammuddin arrives in Pasir Mas in response to challenge

PASIR MAS, Fri. - Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein's presence here today was significant in more ways than one.

The Youth and Sports Minister launched a State-level gathering of youths organised by the Kelantan branch of the Malaysian Youth Council and hosted by the Kubang Panjang 4B Youth movement.

He arrived at Arena Putra, the venue of the gathering, on an elephant in a procession of women and men in traditional Malay warrior costumes.

But his arrival to a traditional welcome was also seen as a response to a challenge issued by Pasir Mas Umno division head Datuk Ibrahim Ali recently.

At last month's Umno general assembly in Kuala Lumpur, Ibrahim, when debating the party president's address, had criticised Hishammuddin for Umno Youth's shortcomings.

Ibrahim had said Umno Youth should make its presence felt, and rather than resorting to rhetorics, should focus on campaigns and activities to counter Pas' allegations.

In response to this, Hishammuddin had said that the Pasir Mas division would be given the honour to be the venue for the movement to start of its programme.

At Arena Putra today, Ibrahim himself was not to be seen as he was at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Kubang Kerian for the launch of KUB Malaysia IT Literacy programme by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Hishammuddin, speaking at the launch of today's gathering, called on youths in the State to buck up work for the betterment of the nation. "This is not for the interest of any quarters or individuals, but that of the country," he said.

He added that the country's youth, accounting for 10.4 million or 40 per cent of the population, form a formidable and important force.

Later, Hishammuddin attended another function, Majlis Mesra Pemuda Umno, held at Kampung Teliar, Bunut Susu, also in the Pasir Mas division.

Addressing Umno Youth members at the function, where Ibrahim was present, Hishammuddin said his presence in Pasir Mas was not because of the challenge issued by Ibrahim.

"I'm here on the resurgence and new spirit of the movement to safeguard the interests of the religion, race and country ... Umno is the only party capable of doing it. I'll keep the spirit alive.

"Not to worry about me, the blood that flows in my body is that of Datuk Onn (Jaafar) and Tun Hussein Onn," he added.

Hishammuddin said the shortcomings and weaknesses of a leader could not be avoided.

However, he said such weaknesses should not be a factor for Umno members to be at logger-heads.

"Now is not the time for Umno members to quarrel. Like it or not, we have to accept that there are weaknesses. We should remember ... if we believe that there is no other party which can protect the Malays except Umno, then why should there be a split (among us)," he said.

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