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Negeri Umno Youth chief out to halt negative image of leaders

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NEWLY-elected Negri Sembilan Umno Youth chief Abdul Ghani Hassan is a true grassroots man who is keen to rid the grassroots perception of Umno Youth leaders as corporate figures constantly on the fast track.

Abdul Ghani, 38, a state football striker during the golden years of the Mokhtar Dahari era and one of the new party leaders in Negri Sembilan, said the negative image of Umno youth leaders seen travelling about in their luxury cars, donning expensive get-ups even on their kampung visits, has to go.

"We have to be casual and easy-going with the people in order to hear out their problems and find solutions to them."

Abdul Ghani who is Rantau State Assemblyman said the corporate image of Umno Youth leaders, had also been made an issue by Opposition parties despite the fact that Opposition leaders themselves drive around in luxury cars.

"The fact that our Umno youth leaders are well-positioned in society should be a matter of pride for the Malay community.

"It also shows the BN Government's success in raising the economic status of Malays."

Abdul Ghani who is the brother of Umno Rasah division chief, Datuk Mohamad Hassan, said what had not been publicised was that the corporate figures within Umno Youth had contributed much towards the welfare of the community's poor and needy.

He said what had to change was the attitude of some leaders who behave as though they were elite members of the community, expecting the grassroots to come to them for help.

Appointed as the State Umno Youth chief two months ago, the father of four said his first role in his new capacity would be to strengthen the 22,000-strong Umno Youth movement in Negri Sembilan.

"Before working on our main agenda of recruiting more youths into Umno, in line with our president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call, we have to get our machinery down to the grassroots level in good working order.

"To do this, we are now entering the various villages and residential areas in efforts to make us more visible."

Abdul Ghani who has always been present at Umno functions, social, religious and cultural gatherings and service centres in the State even before his appointment as Umno Rasah division information chief in 1998, said an important role of the movement was reviving the spirit of the Malay struggle which was particularly strong among Umno members in the 70s.

He said many Umno members had forgotten this struggle which culminated in the New Economic Policy, introduction of Bahasa Melayu as the medium of education and many other revolutionary changes that led to the upliftment of Malays as a force to be reckoned with, in the country.

"Thus, in preparing for the coming general election, we in Umno Youth have the task of reminding our community of this struggle and explaining to them about the reality of the Government's workings.

"There is a general confusion in the minds of many Malays today, created by the lies and hate propaganda being spread by the Opposition."

Abdul Ghani said in Negri Sembilan, Umno and BN shoulder the task of defending the clean sweep of seats in the general election as well as improving, the vote majority for the seats.

He said it was the prerogative of Umno Youth to go forward and win over the confidence of more Malays.

"In the last election, which came too soon after the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, we were caught unprepared to counter the Opposition in taking advantage of the situation to win over voters.

"For the 2004 elections we will be ready as our machinery is already in place, especially geared towards keeping people well-informed to counter the lies of the Opposition."

Abdul Ghani said among the issues that needed to be explained to the people were the workings and purpose of the Internal Security Act and how it helped in maintaining the racial harmony, peace and stability of the country.

"Due to the Opposition's harping on the so-called oppression of human rights with the existence of the ISA, some people are still unclear on the issue.

"We in Umno Youth have the duty to give our clarification on this issue."

Abdul Ghani said religion was another issue which was being used by the Opposition to win voters adding that the State Umno Youth had appointed a religious teacher on its committee, to specifically handle this area.

"We are also preparing at least 10 strong religious speakers within our movement to convince people against being misled by the Opposition parties."

Abdul Ghani said in this aspect, the movement would be approaching youths who have been aligned to the Opposition so far, in efforts to win their confidence in joining Umno.

He added that in the same light, the movement was also preparing a variety of programmes aimed at steering youths, caught up in social ills including the recent emergence of black metal gangs, towards fruitful activities.

"We will work closely with the various related authorities in arranging a variety of positive engagements for these youths including setting them up in businesses, education, culture and sports.

"We will also urge the various enforcement authorities, including the police, to continuously monitor and crackdown on unhealthy activities and not merely on a seasonal basis."

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