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Umno-Melayu (News Analysis)

UMNO MEMBERS NEED TO MEND WAYS TO WIN HEART OF MALAYS

By: Ali Mamat

KUALA LUMPUR: As in the past, the Umno general assembly ends today with a rekindling of the spirit and desire of the members to undertake a self-critique in order to win back the support of the people, especially the Malays.

The delegates and members to the four-day assembly including those of the youth and wanita wings generally agreed that their past mistakes, be they at the leadership or grassroot level, should not be repeated.

They also felt that it is the duty of all Umno members to rise up against those deemed as puppeters and traitors who are the cause of the split in the Malay community, particularly PAS and Keadilan.

Many of the delegates and members met the assembly agreed with the views of the party president, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who reminded the Malays that they could become "slaves" of others or remain just in name in history if they continued to be divided and to lack resilience.

If the zest of the delegates who took part in the debate were to be a yardstick, Umno's goal of re-capturing Kelantan and Terengganu state, besides the seats lost to PAS and Keadilan in Pahang, Kedah, Perlis, Perak and Selangor should not be as difficult as perceived by some people.

DELEGATES MORE CAREFUL

Despite the optimism, there were delegates who chose to be more careful with how they summarised the results of the assembly.

A delegate from a division in Pahang said the fighting spirit exhibited in the speeches could only become a reality if the leaders and members practised what they preached.

"We don't want to see the same things happening as in previous assemblies ... all the mandate of Dr Mahathir and pledges of the delegates and members were scattered to the wind the moment they walked out of PWTC at the end of the assembly," said the delegate, who is also a former senior civil servant.

He observed that in last year's assembly, there were also fiery voices calling on Umno members to make all the sacrifices to regain the party's influence among the Malay community which took a dent in the 1999 general election.

"They looked dead serious to become the movers in the creation of a pool of genuine Malay businessmen and entrepreneurs to fill the quota on the Malay share of the economy under the New Economic Policy," he said.

Unfortunately, when they returned home, they failed to put right their party struggle and instead chose to quarrel among themselves to grab for power either at the divisional or branch level, or for wealth.

ALI BABA CULTURE

He felt that there were some Umno leaders and members who were keeping the "Ali Baba" culture going. "Money were received from the towkays well before the letters of approval for projects or timber concessions were issued," he said.

At the same time, there was a small group of leaders who were reluctant to practise the 'people-friendly' concept and who used middlemen or representatives to deal with the rakyat while spending their time in Kuala Lumpur, he said.

He said the "domino theory" touted by PAS that the states neighbouring

Kelantan and Terengganu would fall into their hands in the next election, should not be dismissed lightly. The slim majority won by Umno candidates in those Malay heartland states should be a good reminder, he added.

His sentiments were shared by a committee member of a division in Terengganu who has been chosen as a delegate for four consecutive years.

The Terengganu delegate said although Umno had lost badly in Terengganu in 1999, there were some divisional and branch leaders who acted arrogantly in public, as if Umno was still in power.

SOUR FACES STILL

At the same time, there were those who still continued to slander each other or to have sour faces for each other even though the divisional elections were over.

"Even though the top leaders had talked themselves hoarse, calling on the members to see where Umno had gone wrong in Terengganu, there are those who are still shackled by their culture of slander, refusal to compromise or the feeling that they are always right or better than others," he said.

In this connection, he urged the Umno leaders to be firm in correcting the situation, including those in the Dungun, Kuala Terengganu and Setiu division, so that the party could face PAS with confidence in the next election.

He also cautioned that in the zeal to inject "new blood" into the party, the old timers, including those from the "Wan Mokhtar" era, should not be simply dismissed, especially when they can still serve and have strong grassroot support.

A veteran from Umno Kelantan who never missed the chance to follow the assembly closely said unlike the past, the identification of a leader or member with a certain camp or faction was now not so obvious in the state.

"This is a good development. Now, we seldom hear about the Annuar Musa camp, the Ibrahim Ali camp, the Mustapa Mohamad or Hussein Ahmad camp. All seemed to be placed under the struggle of Datuk Mustapa Mohamad, who is the state liaison chief," he said.

TIME RIPE FOR "WAR"

He said this was the best time for Umno to respond to the call of several delegates to "open the battleground" and go all out against PAS and Keadilan in Kelantan and Terengganu, and wherever the two opposition parties had set up base.

He however reminded them that in the context of traditional Malay Muslim culture that is based on the kampung culture found in Kelantan and possibly in Terengganu, Pahang, Kedah, Perlis and Selangor, they had to be more clever when launching the "battle".

Like the delegates from Pahang and Terengganu, he said though Umno would have to go on the offensive, the coarse or impolite approach like cursing Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat (the Menteri Besar of Kelantan) and Haji Abdul Hadi Awang (the Menteri Besar of Terengganu), uttered by some delegates like the Umno Pasir Mas leader, Datuk Ibrahim Ali, could backfire on them.

"If we want to win over the PAS people, personal attacks against Nik Aziz or Haji Hadi would not help because their followers would see them as acts to humiliate the ulamak and hence, Islam," he said.

He said the old approach, deployed in the 1970s, would be more effective, that is, by extending the hand of friendship to get closer to all levels of PAS or Keadilan membership and leaders.

"If the gesture is not returned, then concentrate on those facts that cannot be disputed in order to assure the people that PAS does not have development plans that can free them from poverty. Convince the people that

PAS has failed to meet their hope and aspirations," he said. -- Bernama
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