

A wake-up call for **STAR** - 4 JUN 2002 fading PAS scholars

IF THERE is any cue to be taken from the PAS *muktamar* which ended on Sunday, then the 850,000 PAS members nationwide would have to face the reality that their party is split right down the middle between the *ulama* leaders and the professionals and intellectuals.

With most *ulamas* fading into the background it looks as if the battle with Umno now would be a stand-off between the intellectuals and professionals of both parties.

PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor is now at his wits' end trying to do a balancing act but at this particular *muktamar*, Fadzil did something which he had never done before - ticking off the *ulamas*.

The delegates and even party leaders might have touched a lot on election matters but observers felt that this was just a cover-up on the real issue.

Fadzil, in his opening speech, said the establishment in 1983 of the "leadership of the *ulamas*" had given the *ulamas* an important role in taking on Umno.

He said this was a unique feature and the strengthening factor in the party.

However, in the same breath, he said the *ulamas* must take on the challenge of the *ummah* (Muslim community) by looking at "true Islamic teachings" as a source of rulings for current problems of the *ummah*.

"It looked as if the *ulamas* had not been able to play their role in matters pertaining to the current daily needs of the people in politics and socio-economic matters," an observer noted.

He said the *ulamas* were fading into the background and letting the professionals and intellectuals get to the forefront of the party.

To drive home a point that the party needed the *ulamas* in the battle against Umno, Fadzil went on to say that PAS "is now leading not only the Muslims but people of various ethnicity, religion and culture."

"However, whether our positioning is acceptable or not will depend on the ability of our *ulamas* to listen and act for the benefit of the various

The 48th PAS *muktamar* (general assembly) in Kota Baru ended with a wake-up call for its *ulamas* (scholars) to play a more prominent role in the party in preparation for a snap general election. The delegates even ticked off Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Hadi Awang, an *ulama* leader for losing touch with the people. FARID JAMALUDIN and SYED AZHAR reports.

levels of the masses."

Fadzil said the *ulamas* must now come forward to play a more important role in the party in the face of recent attacks on the *ulama* institution by Umno and a few intellectual writers.

Fadzil himself was not spared by the delegates.

It is common knowledge that he had been questioned by certain professionals in the party for representing PAS at recent talks on the Palestinian issue with Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Delegates took potshots at Fadzil during debates by saying that he should not be a part of the talks because it was "an Umno trap."

Fadzil took 15 minutes to explain why he took part in the talks and one reason he put forward was that he wanted to portray the *ulamas*' stand on the matter.

The widening gap in the party had surfaced a long time ago after PAS' stunning performance in the 1999 elections.

At the previous *muktamar*, delegates elected two professionals - Datuk Mustaffa Ali, a former deputy minister when PAS was in the Barisan, and Datuk Dr Hassan Ali - as party vice-presidents while retaining Hassan Shukri, an *ulama* leader, as the third.

It is the professionals who are riding high in the party, with people like Dr Hatta Ramli, Dr Syed Azman Syed Ahmad, Dr Lo' Lo' Ghazali and Husam Musa at the forefront.

In fact, it was Dr Hatta and Dr Lo' Lo' who were at the helm of the party in helping Afghan refugees with their mercy missions at the height of the US invasion against the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

Delegates are now questioning the role of the *ulamas*,

even that of "Tuan Guru" Datuk Seri Hadi Awang, for "losing touch" with the people.

Kedah PAS deputy commissioner Datuk Mohd Muslim Othman said leaders must not be complacent and should look into the welfare of the people or risk losing their support in the next elections.

Hadi defended himself well by saying that there was an element of sabotage in his administration which had 8,000 civil servants and many of them were still "thinking the Umno way."

Dr Hatta, when asked about the *muktamar*, said the meeting was conducted on a sombre note because delegates realised the next general election was expected to be tougher.

However, he said the *muktamar* was also an attempt at consolidating members to work as a "single unit" to face the more efficient Barisan machinery.

"The *muktamar* had been a success in the sense that we have accepted our weaknesses and found ways to overcome them," he said.

Harakah editor-in-chief Zulkifli Sulong said the *muktamar* was the last "congregation" of leaders and members before they go into battle stations for the next elections.

However, none made any reference to one of the resolutions proposed by the central committee and unanimously passed - to urge the *ulamas* to wake up and counter the efforts by certain quarters to destroy the *ulama* institution.

PAS is indirectly admitting that the series of attacks on its *ulama* leaders over the last two years is taking its toll.

"It is already conceding the first round battle in the run-up for the elections," an observer said.