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Yearender Umno (Politics)

UMNO GETS NEW LEADER, CREATES MORE DIVISIONS IN 2003

By: Hafizah Kamaruddin

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 21 (Bernama) -- The Year 2003 saw a leadership change in Umno, Malaysia's biggest and dominant political party, and the creation of 26 new divisions under the redelineation of electoral boundaries and birth of the Federal Territory of Putrajaya.

The retirement of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as Prime Minister on Oct 31 had an impact on Umno because he also handed over the party leadership to his appointed successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The transition of power was smooth after Dr Mahathir announced his intention to resign from all posts in the government, Umno and Barisan Nasional (BN) on the last day of the 53rd Umno General Assembly in June last year.

Abdullah, who took his oath of office as the fifth Prime Minister on Oct 31, is now tasked with leading not only Umno but also BN in the next general election.

Umno's focus now is to wrest Kelantan and Terengganu -- the two east coast states -- from the clutches of PAS.

Umno seriousness in realising its aim can be seen in the changes made to the leadership at both state and division levels.

The first reshuffle was made in January when lawyer Zaid Ibrahim, who is also Kota Bharu Umno division chief, was appointed Kelantan Umno deputy chief, succeeding Peringat division head Datuk Annuar Musa.

Annuar, also former Rural Development Minister, decided to give up the post he held for two terms in line with efforts to infuse new lease of life to Umno's struggles in Kelantan.

Tumpat division deputy chairman Mat Nawawi Mat Jusoh was named State Umno secretary, replacing Kubang Kerian division chief Tuan Hashim Tuan Yaacob, while Peringat deputy head Mohd Alwi Che Ahmad took over as information chief from Machang division head Datuk Ismail Mamat.

Bachok Umno deputy head Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussin, who is also Tenaga Nasional Bhd Chairman, was appointed Treasurer in place of Datuk Dr Nik Hussin Abdul Rahman.

Dr Mahathir, in announcing the reshuffles, said it was aimed at creating a mix of old guards and young turks to strengthen Kelantan Umno.

On Nov 22, Abdullah announced the removal of four division heads in the state from the list of pro tem chiefs.

Tuan Hashim was replaced by Datuk Ahmad Rosli Ibrahim while Dr Awang Adek was promoted to Bachok Umno division head, succeeding Datuk Ahmad Shahibuddin Mohd Noor.

Former Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Paduka Ibrahim Ali was replaced by his deputy Datuk Abdul Rahim Abdul Rahman while Datuk Ramzi Abdul Rahman took over from Datuk Wan Zaid Wan Abdullah as Kuala Krai division head. Ramzi is also Abdullah's political secretary.

In TERENGGANU, Umno launched the "Gelombang Biru" movement in April to recapture the oil-rich state which fell into PAS' hands in the last general election.

The movement, aimed at instilling awareness among the Terengganu people on PAS' weaknesses since forming the state government, seemed to have an impact on the rakyat.

Creation of the additional 26 divisions had also enhanced Umno's machinery, which later appointed 29 new faces as division pro tem heads, majority of whom heading the newly established divisions.

Umno's fortress -- Johor -- was allotted six divisions -- the highest in the country -- bringing the total divisions to 26. This made Johor the state with the highest number of divisions.

The new divisions are Pasir Gudang led by Datuk Mohd Ali Hassan, Sekijang (Baharom Mohamad), Semberong (Datuk Hishamuddin Tun Hussein), Pengerang (Harun Abdullah), Ayer Hitam (Hamzah Ramli) and Tanjung Piai (Nasir Safar).

Sabah and Selangor received five new divisions, bringing the total to 25 and 22, respectively, while three divisions have been carved out in Pahang, making it to 14.

Penang now has 13 divisions, with Batu Kawan and Bukit Gelugor, being the two new ones.

Perak, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka has one additional division each while the birth of Putrajaya prompted Umno to set up an additional branch in the Federal Territory.

Dr Mahathir's resignation from all government and political posts also saw him handing over his post as Kubang Pasu division head to his deputy Tan Sri Osman Aroff, the former Menteri Besar of Kedah.

BN Secretary-General and Pulai Member of Parliament Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat also paved the way to his deputy, who is also his son, Nur Jazlan, to take over as the division's pro tem head.

Johor Wanita Umno chief Datuk Halimah Sadique, the only woman division chief in the country, has been appointed Tenggara division pro tem head.

This year also saw Puteri Umno attending the 54th Umno General Assembly in June as a new entity.

Puteri Umno, formed in 2000, was accepted as Umno's new wing in October last year.

On the whole, Umno has more than three million members from 19,000 branches, 191 divisions and 44 oversea Umno Clubs covering six continents.

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