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Much remains to be done in Kedah

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ALTHOUGH not everything is rosy in Kedah, all is not lost for Umno.

Senior party statesmen have said that they need only heed Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's advice to strengthen the position of Kedah Umno.

The Prime Minister recently reminded Umno members to stop jostling for position. This, many believe, is at the heart of Kedah's problems.

In his speech at the opening of his Kubang Pasu division meeting last month, he warned Umno members that the infighting must stop as this is only to the advantage of Pas.

Kedah Umno, in the words of a former senior State Umno leader and former State Exco member, is in a "critical" stage.

So Kedah Umno should clean up its act because if it does not, then, in Dr Mahathir's words, "Pas will win because we have defeated ourselves, and not because they are efficient or clever".

Some Kedah Umno veterans say the problem has been repeatedly denied by State leaders and have urged the leaders to "go to the ground and the truth will be revealed".

However, Menteri Besar and Kedah Umno liaison chief Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain has maintained that all is well. He has invited those who have said Kedah Umno was weak to come to the State and "see reality" for themselves.

He reiterated that Kedah Umno is strong and assured that there would not be a repeat of the "drama" that followed when several incumbents and aspirants protested at not being selected for the 1999 Barisan Nasional general election line-up.

He has also taken upon himself the responsibility to see that party members and officials support BN candidates chosen for the next general election.

Many are hopeful that Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who will be heading BN at the next general election, will screen candidates and drop names that could be a liability to BN.

Syed Razak took over as Menteri Besar and State Umno liaison chief from Tan Sri Sanusi Junid when Kedah Umno was said to be at its weakest.

Now it is his responsibility to ensure that BN continues to be in power.

His other big task is to ensure that there are second-echelon leaders in the State and capable leaders in Umno and the government at Federal level, something which Kedah boasted of in the past.

At present, there are only Dr Mahathir, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Paduka Kadir Sheikh Fadzir and parliamentary secretary to Education Ministry Datuk Mahadzir Khir in the Government.

The Religious Adviser to the Prime Minister, Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Othman, is the only elected Umno supreme council member from the State.

When Sanusi was Menteri Besar and State Umno liaison chief, his appointments and choice of candidates did not go down well with many. This, many believe, was the start of Kedah Umno's problems.

They point to the near fatal blow to Umno in the 1999 general election when Pas won eight parliamentary and 12 State seats.

Even Dr Mahathir, who retained his Kubang Pasu seat, was returned by a reduced majority.

Of course, it was said the Opposition cashed in on the anti-Government sentiments then.

Then a year later, BN lost Lunas to Parti Keadilan Nasional in a by-

election, causing it to lose its two-thirds majority in the State Legislative Assembly.

BN won the Pendang parliamentary seat in another by-election last year but failed to wrest the Anak Bukit State seat from Pas.

The losses, especially in Anak Bukit, said Dr Mahathir, was not because Kedah Umno was weak but that it did not work hard enough.

A BN assemblyman said Syed Razak should take his cue from Dr Mahathir's statement.

"The obvious step any leader will take when faced with such a situation is to work doubly hard to put Kedah Umno house in order."

Kedah Umno leaders are working towards this but, many say, not hard enough.

The State Umno and BN machinery are still trying to put their act together when all the other States are good and ready.

Political observers say that a wrong strategy was the stumbling block in winning back the hearts and minds of Malays.

They cited the State's Mesra Rakyat programme which was noble but failed to appeal to Malays. Then it was the Kedah Maju 2010 action plan, but it could not counter Pas' campaigning.

What could have been a boost to BN was also lost due to plain miscalculation. Syed Razak kept postponing requests from leaders of Chinese associations and guilds for a meeting.

Pas did the most logical thing: get closer to them. A series of meetings and dialogues were held between Pas leaders and the Chinese community to persuade them to give just one chance for the Opposition to prove itself.

There is also the issue of the new Kedah Umno Youth chief Datuk Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir who is not so popular with the Chinese community.

Aziz, the national Umno Youth deputy chief, is aware that some Chinese in Kedah agreed with the Opposition's claim that he was anti-Chinese.

He was so labelled for leading a protest against Chinese organisation Suqiu for questioning Malay special rights three years ago.

Aziz has since said that he is working hard to counter that allegation and regain the trust of the Chinese.

Such is his commitment that he has even relocated his family to Kedah so that he could effectively serve the party.

Wanita Umno and Puteri Umno won credit for organising activities to get the support of Malay women.

However, Puteri should be aware that Pokok Sena was not chosen as the venue for Pas women's wing golden jubilee celebrations for nothing.

It was meant to boost the morale of the muslimat (Pas women's wing) in Kedah which is busy visiting households to gather support for the party.

Kedah Umno, says a political observer, needs only to look at the Opposition to know that the State will still remain with BN. However, it needs to do more than that.