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Press goes to town with revamp of Kelantan Umno leadership

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HARDLY three weeks into the New Year and Malaysians are already hearing the drumbeat for the political war that seems imminent with talk of a general election in the air.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad fired the first salvo with a revamp of the Kelantan Umno leadership to strengthen the primary Barisan Nasional component before the polls. Kota Baru Umno division chief and lawyer Zaid Ibrahim took over as deputy head, replacing incumbent Datuk Annuar Musa.

Nawawi Mat Jusoh took over from Tuan Hashim Tuan Yaacob as secretary, Tenaga Nasional chairman Datuk Awang Adek Hussin replaced Datuk Nik Hussain Ab Rahman as treasurer, while Che Alwi Che Ahmad replaced Datuk Ismail Mamat as information chief.

The Bahasa Malaysia Press went to town with the shake-up, reporting the Prime Minister's announcement and its implications in a series of editorials and analyses.

While Umno members mulled over the announcement which is widely seen as the first in a series of moves aimed at wresting back the State from Pas, which began its own preparations for the battle looming ahead.

This saw acting Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang inviting the DAP to join hands in fighting the BN.

Berita Harian, in an editorial yesterday, took a philosophical view of the changes in the Kelantan Umno line-up. Advising those affected and others to accept that change was sometimes painful, it said some may have to sacrifice for the welfare of many.

Saying that change had to be forced when it did not come naturally, the newspaper added that it was of the same view as Dr Mahathir, in that Kelantan Umno needed a new mix of veteran and younger leaders to lead the election campaign.

Berita Harian felt that Umno had not hesitated in underlining its priorities, by going for the welfare of the people instead of retaining specific people in the leadership.

Umno, it said, had not vacillated, but had acted promptly to show that it was earnest in wanting to win back the State which it had ruled several times in the past.

Berita Harian opined that the reaction to the changes had been positive so far, with those axed accepting their fate calmly and understanding the reasons behind the move.

In a telling statement on the state of affairs in the Kelantan Umno, it said Pas' three-term victory had also been due to in-fighting within the party in the State. In this respect, Berita Harian advised supporters of those who had been replaced to join ranks and form a common stand against Pas.

Utusan Malaysia columnist Awang Sulung, in a light-hearted commentary on the situation in the Kelantan Umno leadership, said the question of old or new faces did not arise where the party was concerned.

In his Bisik Bisik column, he said what mattered was that leaders worked hard and gave priority to the party. While old faces may feel that they had a right to remain and contest the coming polls, Awang said, new faces may feel that the veterans should give way.

Stating a truism, the columnist felt that politics was not about giving opportunities to people but nominating those who stood the best chance of winning.

Another view of the situation was presented in another commentary in the Utusan Malaysia yesterday, with the writer saying that Pas should not take the revamp as an instance of shadow-play within Umno.

Rather, he said, it was an indication of Umno's, especially Dr Mahathir's, resolve in helping the people of Kelantan.

The columnist hoped the changes in the Umno leadership would breathe new life into Kelantan Umno, which had so far not been given much chance of ending Pas rule.

In an adjunct to developments in Kelantan, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi stated on Friday that revamps would likely be carried out in other State Umno liaison committees.

Speaking in George Town, he had said that this was necessary to strengthen the party and the BN in preparing for the forthcoming polls.

Berita Harian quoted him as saying that Umno needed to be beefed up for the polls.

The Chinese newspapers, meanwhile, were busy following up on Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim's suggestion that a curfew be imposed on the young to prevent them from engaging in anti-social behaviour.

Last Thursday saw the Sin Chew urging all State Governments to study the proposal carefully so that only those which could be enforced are enacted.

It said that laws which were not fully thought out would only create difficulties for the people and affect the integrity of the Government.

In this respect, the newspaper suggested that the Perlis Government try to first understand the psyche of teenagers before embarking on measures involving them.

The newspaper also suggested that the State Government set up more activity centres to attract teenagers towards healthy activities. It also opined that good moral values be taught through schools and the family institution.

Nanyang Siang Pau quoted National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman as saying that the State should obtain feedback from teenagers and experts before proceeding with the proposed curfew.

She was quoted as saying that any proposed legislation should not contravene the rights of children.

The newspaper and Sin Chew also quoted Bar Council president Mah Weng Kwai as saying that teenagers detained in future under the proposed law could sue the State Government. This, he said, was because the proposal was ultra vires the Federal Constitution, besides contravening human rights.

The newspaper quoted Mah as suggesting that the State Government look at other ways of disciplining teenagers and helping them engage in healthy social activities.