

PKR on charm offensive to regain Malay votes
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In an effort to regain the Malay votes in the face of the upcoming general election, PKR is expected to step up their onslaught in the communal heartland.

Starting with the appointment of former religious bureau head Muhammad Nor Manuty into the powerful information bureau a few weeks ago, the party will also be putting in more effort to "clear the air" on their stand regarding Malay rights and Islam.

"Perhaps it is more or less in the party leadership's thinking that my appointment can contribute to the clean-up of the misunderstanding that PKR does not take these issues seriously.

"It has become a PKR priority this year to work extra hard in the Malay belt," said Muhammad Nor (left).

Since the height of PKR's support back in the 2008 general election, it is said that Malay support for the reformist party has been on the downward trend.

Amplified with the controversial party elections just last year as well as Umno's recent attacks on Pakatan Rakyat over alleged neglect of the Malay special privileges and the position of Islam, PKR is now aiming to recapture the Malay votes for the next polls said to be held as early as this year.

But apart from the usual onslaught of "alternative opinions amidst lies from Umno and BN", Muhammad Nor also revealed that a charm offensive to the Malay and Islamic heartland will very much be a part of the PKR strategy this year.

"We have no problems with the urban areas. But it's the rural areas where we have a lot of work to do, especially when they don't have access to alternative news sources," he told Malaysiakini.

Mosques and suraus to be hotspots

Targeting the mosques and suraus around the country, the former Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (Abim) president said that the party would be going on a roadshow to the heartland of the Malay community.

Muhammad Nor said that the party will be doing a lot more to organise seminars and workshops as well as increasing their presence during Islamic festivals.

But anticipating a backlash since giving political speeches inside mosques is not encouraged, especially in Selangor where it had been the subject of a royal decree, he also said that he expects some "difficulties".

"But there are some mosque authorities and administrations who are more 'activist-minded'," he said.

'Abim confused no more'

Meanwhile, Muhammad Nur confirmed that a meeting took place between several senior Abim leaders with PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim two days ago in Kuala Lumpur.

It was understood that Abim, one of the most organised and powerful Muslim movements in the country, had been in a silent uproar over Anwar's speech at the London School of Economics last March.

Anwar (right) - one of the Abim pioneers back in the 1970s - had delivered a speech entitled "Religion and Pluralism in a Divided World".

Drawing ire from the more conservative segments in Abim, former movement president Yusri Mohamad became one of Anwar's most vocal critics on the matter, claiming that the veteran politician had encouraged religious pluralism.

However, Muhammad Nur said that the recent meeting had cleared the air with Abim, of which its members make up a sizeable force in PKR.

"We told them that although the audience (in London) were predominantly westerners with critical views on Islam, we maintained that Anwar was there to defend the position of Islam.

"It was a very cordial meeting and I think now they understand our stand," he said.

He added that well-known Islamic scholar Prof Osman Bakar had chaired the meeting.

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