

'Kingmakers' PAS won't play second fiddle
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It is a long and winding road ahead for the fledging Pakatan Rakyat coalition judging by the ongoing at the PAS 54th muktamar in Ipoh which ended today.
MCPX

Talks of being sidelined by Pakatan partners in Penang and Selangor were top order for many party delegates, urged on by PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang's call for party members to be wary of their role in the coalition.

pas muktamar 2008 hadi"Let us not be complacent and allow ourselves to be sidelined," stressed Abdul Hadi, without any specific reference to Pakatan, in his policy speech.

Unlike Abdul Hadi however, delegates were more forthright in their criticisms against Pakatan and how the party had been turned into a junior partner in the two states.

A delegate from Penang had lamented that the DAP-led state government had never invited PAS for talks, while Selangor PAS Youth had complained on the difficulties in securing a meeting with Menteri Besar Abdul Khalid Ibrahim from PKR.

The points raised by delegates were surreal since the focus of their criticism was their Pakatan partners while their annual Umno-bashing session was kept to a bare minimum.

Even the controversial Bar Council 'conversion' forum did not manage to find its way into the debates.

Despite being stirred by Abdul Hadi to debate PAS' relationship in Pakatan, the delegates' concerns however were left without a reply when the party leader delivered his winding-up speech.

Nevertheless, even with Pakatan's teething problems, the PAS muktamar saw the delegates fully backing the party's continued participation in the coalition as opposed to a cooperation with Umno, which PAS spiritual leader Nik Aziz Nik Mat described as unashamed and corrupt.

'Don't question us'

However, the muktamar was laden with suggestions that PAS was moving towards poisoning itself as the dominant party within the coalition.

pas muktamar 54th ipoh stadium opening day 150808 09The party's ambitions were laid very clearly when the seven-point resolution on "strengthening Pakatan Rakyat" was tabled and unanimously accepted.

The resolution called for PAS leaders to play a bigger role in deciding Pakatan's policies and direction. The resolution also urged Pakatan leaders to respect PAS' Islamic struggles and not "raise any sensitive issues which could threaten our cooperation".

This is bound to raise eyebrows among the more secular DAP and the multi-ethnic PKR which

adopts a more open approach towards "sensitive issues" than PAS.

Other obvious signs of the party's hopes of dominating Pakatan appeared when the Dewan Ulama mooted Abdul Hadi as a "more qualified prime minister".

When quizzed by reporters on the matter, Abdul Hadi was non-committal as to whether PAS would support Anwar Ibrahim's aggressive bid to become the prime minister.

Anwar leads PKR which has the largest number of seats in Parliament with 31, followed by DAP with 28 and PAS with only 23, making the Islamist party a 'junior' partner despite the party having the largest membership and most efficient election machinery.

With its vast membership and sizeable number of seats in Parliament and state assemblies, Abdul Hadi had made a important proclamation, although only fleetingly, that PAS was now the "kingmakers" in the Malaysian political arena.

"Make PAS a party which leads and not a party which piggybacks," he said in his policy speech.

Getting the non-Muslims

pas muktamar 2008 nik azizPAS delegates also displayed an unprecedented amount of enthusiasm in staking a bigger slice of the non-Muslim votes.

Nearly every delegate debating the presidential address supported Abdul Hadi's suggestion to grant PAS supporters' club members a larger role in the party.

Notably, there had been a large swing in the non-Malay votes towards DAP and PKR during the March 8 general election and to a certain extent the swing had spilled over to PAS.

For example, the party's victories in Kedah and Perak were to a large extent aided by a large swing in Indian votes, revealed PAS vice-president Mohamad Sabu.

Replying to the delegates in his winding-up speech, Abdul Hadi said that the party would take heed from the delegates' calls and would look into ways of making changes soon.

pas muktamar 2008 kamaruddin mustaffa hadi"God willing, we would upgrade the supporters' clubs into an important wing within the party," said Abdul Hadi which drew loud chants of Allahuakhbar from the approving crowd.

PAS national unity bureau chief Dr Mujahid Yusuf Rawa said he was not surprised that the delegates would urge the party leadership to consider the matter.

Mujahid said that prior to the general election, the party leadership had already ordered the PAS leadership in all states to form such clubs.

"The clubs were of strategic importance and when (the state leaders) formed the clubs, they saw the benefits of having a platform to bridge the gap with non-Muslims," he said when met after Abdul Hadi's speech.

Mujahid said that it is now likely that the party leadership would set up a technical committee to study how to enhance the role of the approximately 10,000 supporter club members.

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