

Himpun backs Hasan, says time for PAS-Umno unity
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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 14 — Himpunan Sejuta Umat (Himpun) today announced its unequivocal support for the embattled Datuk Dr Hasan Ali, saying it was time for PAS and Umno — the country's two biggest Malay political parties — to unite in the interests of Islam and Muslims.

Himpun, which organised a "gathering of a million Muslims" back in October, said Hasan's willingness to discuss inter-party unity talks should be fully lauded and supported, stressing that Islamic unity is a duty that must be fulfilled by all Muslims.

Hasan yesterday openly announced his willingness to accept any invitation from the prime minister to discuss uniting the Islamist party with Umno, claiming he would do so using Islam as his platform.

In an interview with Utusan Malaysia, the Selangor state executive councillor, whose political future in PAS currently hangs in balance, said he would give a "positive answer" to such an invitation.

"When unity is mooted for Islam, in the name of the faith, all of us have a duty to support it because it is within the demands of our faith. It is Allah's decree.

"No matter who said it, we have to give our support. It is hoped this message will make Muslim politicians who have till now refused to unite under the banner of Islam realise (the truth)," Himpun co-chairman Dr Yusri Mohamad was quoted by Utusan Malaysia as saying.

Extremism in political sentiments, said Yusri, has led to "never-ending" disunity among Muslims in this country.

The Himpun leader said Umno and PAS should take note of Hasan's remarks, and that it was time for both parties to make a bold decision for the interest of all Muslims.

Hasan has consistently supported Himpun's activities and views, and even attended its inaugural gathering in Shah Alam two months ago.

The Selangor executive councilor has said he was willing to co-operate with any party other than PAS as long as their struggle involves three key elements: Islam, the Malays and the royal institution.

He reiterated his readiness to accept the possibility of being dropped from PAS's candidates list for the coming polls, but alleged there may be "interference" from among his party's state leadership.

PAS denied on Sunday Utusan Malaysia's report that Hasan and former deputy president Nasharudin Mat Isa will be dropped as candidates, saying discussions on candidates have not begun.

The report follows Selangor PAS information chief Shaari Sungib's remarks, published in several blogs, that Hasan did not garner enough nominations from PAS branches in the state.

Widely seen as a religious conservative, Hasan has been at odds with the ruling Selangor Pakatan Rakyat (PR) government's seemingly liberal policies on several occasions, most notably his push for a beer sale ban in the country's most developed state earlier this year.

Utusan Malaysia last week sought to paint Hasan as the maker of an elusive match between Umno and PAS, claiming he was seen as a unifying factor for the Malay community in Selangor.

The newspaper said the award of the "Datuk Paduka" title to Hasan over the weekend will play a role in "marrying" Umno and PAS.

Since Election 2008, Umno has made repeated overtures to the Islamist party, claiming that a unification would guarantee the Malay community's hold on political power.

But PAS has repeatedly snubbed the efforts and expressed its commitment towards PR and their common aim to oust Umno and Barisan Nasional from Putrajaya.

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