

In Najib's Kuala Kangsar visit, a sign of nerves in Umno's camp
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KUALA KANGSAR, April 26 — Umno leaders have dismissed Datuk Kamilia Ibrahim's resignation as a minor hurdle to its campaign for Kuala Kangsar but Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders believe their enemy's machinery is in shambles, and a strong fear of losing the stronghold is the reason behind Datuk Seri Najib Razak's visit here today.

The Umno president and Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman will headline a mammoth 1 Malaysia gathering at the Arena Square in the royal township this morning, giving Umno's campaign the boost it needs to recapture a seat it won by just 1,458 votes in the last polls.

But division leaders here insisted to The Malaysian Insider yesterday that their party machinery is not in disarray, with the seat's incumbent Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz even saying that Kamilia's departure had zero impact on Umno's Kuala Kangsar campaign.

"The ladies with her earlier have realised what she is... and nobody wants to be associated with a traitor of the party," Rafidah said when contacted yesterday.

"The two people who proposed her candidacy on Saturday's nomination were not from Wanita Umno... they were her daughters and cousin, if I'm not mistaken," the six-term MP for Kuala Kangsar added.

When approached on the campaign trail here yesterday, Rafidah's replacement for the Kuala Kangsar contest, Datuk Mohammad Khai'ril Anuar Wan Ahmad, told The Malaysian Insider that the episode with Kamilia has blown over.

He said during his walkabouts, no voter asked him about Kamilia's resignation or showed any sign of disgruntlement towards Umno.

"Only reporters are asking me if this has hurt our machinery. But the BN machinery is in tact and we are working hard... in fact, Wanita Umno has been very supportive and they know what's to be done.

"End of the day, it's the party that matters and we are just individuals who represent the party... we are not contesting on an individual basis," he said.

Kamilia dropped a bombshell on her party last weekend when she quit her Umno posts to contest as an independent in Kuala Kangsar, citing her disillusionment with the party leadership for failing to pick her as a candidate.

But since then she has gone silent and has only been seen on the campaign trail with her daughter, only speaking to the media through Facebook posts and emailed releases of her video statements.

When contacted yesterday, Kamilia told The Malaysian Insider that her team had only just prepared her campaign schedule and will be emailing it out "soon" to the media.

"Thanks for your concern," she said, but would not speak further. No email has been received since then.

The former Wanita No. 2 was among the 61 Umno members who went rogue for the polls, forsaking their party membership to join the race as independents in what is seen as the stiffest contest for federal power yet in the history of Malaysian elections.

Kuala Kangsar was held for six terms by Rafidah before this but in the 2008 polls, the political veteran survived the political tsunami in her stronghold by a mere 1,458 votes.

She was replaced in the coming contest by Mohammad Khai'ril, the incumbent in the Bukit Chandan state seat under Kuala Kangsar.

Mohammad Khair'il will be facing both Kamilia and PAS's Drs Khalil Idham Lim Abdullah, a known Chinese-Muslim who was formerly the assemblyman for Titi Serong.

Speaking to The Malaysian Insider while on the trail yesterday, Khalil Idham said Kamilia's departure had likely frayed nerves in the Umno camp, pointing to the lightning visits by top party leaders to Kuala Kangsar since Nomination Day.

"If Najib has decided to come here, and then his deputy is coming soon, while (Perak Menteri Besar) Datuk Seri Dr Zambry (Abd Kadir) arrived shortly after nomination... we know it is a big problem for them," he said.

But Khalil Idham said the leaders' presence would make no difference to the Kuala Kangsar contest, believing that the internal strife in Umno here would continue unfettered.

"Because Kamilia is a person who actually works. They can say what they like about here but she actually goes into the villages to work," he said.

He said there was talk in Umno circles that speculate that while Kamilia may not win the contest, her candidacy would be a spoiler to Umno's vote and not to the opposition.

"She is said to be able to garner at least 2,800 votes... and that is a lot. Even 500 votes would hurt Umno's campaign here," he said, pointing to the vote majority in 2008.

His targets are the constituency's young and women voters, who make up a sizeable percentage of the 33,607-strong electorate at 42 per cent and over 51 per cent respectively.

Khalil Idham said the Chinese community, who form 22 per cent of the electorate, will also help swing the vote in favour of PR this May 5.

"In 2008, it was only in Kuala Kangsar that the Chinese community did not swing much to us... because they still feared PAS.

"This time, things have changed. If we could get something like 75 to 80 per cent of the Chinese votes, up from 50 per cent before, we would have our edge against our rivals," he said.

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