

Asri backs controversial book on reforming PAS
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Popular Islamic scholar Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin has thrown his intellectual support behind a recently published controversial book which had boldly proposed internal reforms within the Muslim-based party.

The 194-page book, titled 'Towards a New PAS' and authored by PAS central committee member Mujahid Yusuf Rawa, has the potential to create a rift between the ulama and young turks within the party.

The Kedah Ulama Council has already called for its ban, while Mujahid, the MP for Parit Buntar, is on a road show for four consecutive nights to 'discuss' the content of his daring book.

At a lecture in Bukit Mertajam last night, Asri (left) described Mujahid as a reformist within the party, who has proposed some important changes to help the organisation head towards a new era.

Asri, a University Sains Malaysia professor, said PAS has no choice but to respond to the current political reality, whether the party likes it or not.

"Whether it (PAS) says it or not, many things in the past can no longer be used now; whatever it insisted on in the past cannot be maintained now because PAS has to interact with the political reality of today," he added.

"Politics is not mere rhetoric or use of flowery words," he told a crowd of 100 who attended the two-hour lecture.

Asri, a former Perlis mufti, praised Mujahid for suggesting that PAS needed to be nationalised within the framework of a nation-state so as to convince the public about its commitment to the people.

This would dispel the myth that PAS was 'unconstitutional' or that it is not a national party, a perception that came following certain speeches by several party leaders which appeared unsupportive of the constitution, he added.

He concurred with Mujahid that a party leader does not have to be a religious scholar as 'ability and skills' to lead a nation would qualify him more for a leadership position.

"If a leader is not skilful, he will not be able to implement justice in the country...he must also be skilful, and not just in the literal sense," he said.

"In the past, there were leaders who were criticised by others but the Prophet still appointed them because of their ability and skilfulness in leadership," he added.

Mujahid's book, which was partly based on his thesis, was rejected by the Kedah ulama on Dec 29 as "unnecessary, especially when it was voiced out by someone who considers himself a PAS member".

The council's deputy chief Yusuf Mahmud was quoted as saying that he disagreed with Mujahid's idea to transform the concept of leadership by ulama as practised by PAS for the last two decades.

He claimed that the publication of the book was an attempt to confuse the public about the party's struggles based on Islam.

'Don't just preach about openness'

The son of former PAS president Yusuf Rawa denied that he had ever questioned Islam or the basis of the party's struggle in his book.

"Islam is my struggle...I never questioned an inch of it in my book...as it is my struggle until the day I die," he stressed.

During his one-hour lecture, Mujahid (left) hinted that those who criticised and rejected his book "should not merely preach about openness" because when the issues were directly related to them, they reacted by seeking to ban his book.

He appeared rather disappointed that his book was not given the space to be discussed as it was not his intention to claim that the contents of the book were great and that people must agree with his ideas after reading it.

"You can either agree or disagree with me as long as it is not about something absolute... for example, if I proposed that the five prayers times for Muslims should be reduced to only three times due to our busy schedule... then I really deserve a slap," he said, tongue-in-cheek.

"But something that is changeable like an organisation which changes according to its surrounding, to technology or expertise, can be reviewed or criticised," he added.

"If an organisation does not change, then it would become a dinosaur party... an organisation like that can become obsolete... like the skeletons kept in a museum."

The word 'baru' (new) in his book title posed another problem too, said Mujahid, as members questioned if it were a comparative study between the previous and current leadership.

He added that members were not adverse to the concept of a 'new' car, house or even wife, however, at the mention of a new PAS, they would react with a "sour face".

But by new, Mujahid said he meant that the party needed a new approach and way of thinking to develop it further.

"For example, there is now a new wing in PAS called the Assembly of PAS supporters, who are non-Muslims, which never existed before...this is what I mean when I said 'new'...it is not to compare the current situation with the past," he added.

"We also need new strategies to face the coming general election.