

BN dissidents struggle to be heard, join pressure group
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by Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

Several former BN key leaders say the democratic space within the coalition's component parties is dwindling, driving them to join newly-formed Angkatan Amanah Merdeka (Amanah) to be heard.

Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, and former tourism minister Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir - both from Umno - said the current leadership no longer allowed dissident in the party.

"We still have (confidence in the party) but we chose another space to voice our opinion to the people. There is no room in the party (for dissent)," Kadir said.

The freedom for dissent against the government and the party's stand existed in Umno, he said, until the administration of its fourth president Hussein Onn.

Kadir's position was echoed by Razaleigh, the Amanah founding chairperson, who said, "for me, there is no (room in the party)."

Both veteran politicians then cited the Umno annual general meeting (AGM) as an example.

They claimed that the delegates and their speeches must be approved by the party leadership before they could speak at the AGM.

"Therefore the voice from the bottom is not heard," said Razaleigh.

"We work hard to hold the AGM but only talk about sweet things. We might as well just write them down," quipped Abdul Kadir, who is one of the six deputy presidents of Amanah.

Another deputy president, former MCA president and Pandan MP Ong Tee Keat, added that being a BN MP does not deny his right to join an NGO.

They stressed that Amanah is an independent NGO that voices the concerns of the people, even if they are against the current administration.

The trio, together with former MIC deputy president S Subramaniam, called the press conference at Razaleigh's residence in Kuala Lumpur this afternoon to announce the Registrar of Society's approval of Amanah's establishment.

The organisation, launched in July, aims to revive the "sense of togetherness and true family spirit that prevailed among all Malaysians during the time of our common struggles for national independence".

Other central council members of Amanah include Sabah BN component party United Pasokmomogun Kadazan Dusun Murut Organisation (Upko) deputy president Wilfred M Bumburing, veteran Sarawak opposition politician Daniel Tajem, former Bar Council president K Ragunath and former Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) commissioner Simon Sipaun.

Although Amanah will remain as an NGO in the near future, Razaleigh did not rule out any possibility for the organisation to become politically active.

"It is up to the members... I'm not saying yes or saying no because it depends on the members," said the Kelantan prince, adding that the NGO has embarked on a members recruitment campaign and planned to set up state committees throughout the country.

"You cannot write off anything because the possibilities are there," he repeated when asked whether Amanah will allow its members to contest in the next general election.

On his role in the next election, Razaleigh chose to keep the cards close his to chest.

"It is very difficult to say what I'm going to do in the next election.

"Why not be patient?" he said with a smile.

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