

KJ: Progressive views now mainstream in Umno
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by Andrew Ong

Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin said that the views of progressive elements in Umno are increasingly becoming mainstream.

Speaking at a conference on national unity today, Khairy cited himself and Umno supreme council member Saifuddin Abdullah as two party leaders with progressive thinking and that their views are being increasingly accepted by the party.

He said that the best example of victories by the progressives were the recent reforms introduced by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

This included the abolition of the Internal Security Act 1964 and Emergency-era laws as well as promise amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984.

He said that both he and Saifuddin had made such proposals before.

Admitting that there are very conservative elements within Umno who would object to progressive views and reforms, Khairy (right) said it was not impossible to persuade them otherwise.

“The day after (Najib) announced (the reforms), suddenly, every single one of the Umno leadership who the day before, had sworn on their lives to defend the ISA till their last drop of blood, were congratulating the prime minister on what a great idea it was.

“But that is okay. At the end of the day, it tells you that the progressive views that I and Saifuddin carry are becoming the accepted view in Umno.

“What is important is that the prime minister is listening and the progressive views are being taken up,” he told the audience during a question-and-answer session.

New social contract

Earlier in his speech, Khairy said there was a need for a new social contract to foster national unity in the modern context, an idea he explored in his column in The Edge Financial Daily last month.

Among others, the chief purpose of the new social contract was to have a single school system as opposed to the current system of vernacular schools existing parallel with national type schools.

He said that this was necessary in order to foster racial integration and national unity, and a possible tradeoff would be the doing away of certain racial quotas and introduction of greater meritocracy.

However, such a proposal can only be implemented by means of a referendum, said Khairy.

Speaking to reporters later, Khairy said he would not be raising the issue in Parliament because he was concerned that it would be muddled by politics and instead mooted the idea for civil society at a preliminary stage.

“These initiatives are doomed to failure because of politics. And in Parliament, they are all politicians,” said Khairy, who is the Rembau MP.

He stressed that his intention was to stir up debate because such a drastic proposal cannot be implemented unless a significant portion of the population agrees.

“It is a very sensitive issue. I don’t want (the press) to say that KJ wants to close down vernacular schools. Don’t quote me saying that.

“We want an agreement for a single school (system) that will teach Mandarin and Tamil (as well) with good quality education. Will everyone agree to such a school?” he asked.

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