

'PAS and Umno must remain separate entities'

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By Hafiz Yatim

INTERVIEW PAS central committee member Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad fully backs party spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat in opposing any move to hold 'unity talks' with Umno.

Amid persistent speculation that the idea is still being pursued, Dzulkefly reasons that PAS must "remain outside Umno" to provide checks and balances in the national political equation.

azlan "PAS and Umno must exist as separate entities as there is a need for quality checks and balances for the benefit of the country. Unity of the Malays and Muslims does not necessarily mean that the two parties must be in the same organisation," he said.

"Certainly, you would want to have the strength of the Malays and the supremacy of Islam, but such 'political unity' may bring about tyranny of a different nature.

"It could lead to abuse of power, which is wrong in any religion, including Islam. Having two different entities will enable better checks and balances."

He supports the current arrangement, where PAS is part of Pakatan Rakyat, to build a strong two-party political system.

NONEDzulkefly (right), the former Kuala Selangor MP and a toxicologist by training, also spoke of the need to continuously 're-engineer' PAS in order to place it in the centrestage of national politics.

He said the Islamic party must be seen as being inclusive, friendly and a champion of justice for all, as well as being able to project the universal values also inherent in Islam.

The party must remember that it has come a long way, Dzulkefly said, expressing satisfaction that the 'walls of prejudice' have come down in the efforts of PAS to accommodate other views.

One sign of inclusiveness was seen during the 13th general election campaign, when PAS fielded non-Muslims as candidates.

"PAS managed to eradicate the negative stereotyping of Islam through its battle cry 'PAS for all'. People in urban areas have come to understand that PAS is more progressive," he said.

"But PAS is at a critical juncture. Will we move toward enhancing understanding of Islam or will this go backwards? PAS will remain the PAS of old if we do not work with non-Muslims."

Contest for top party posts?

Dzulkefly admitted there is real anxiety as PAS heads towards its party leadership elections at the end of the year, but said he does not see factionalism among professionals and activist ulama in the party.

"I have hope and faith in the delegates to decide what is best for PAS. The members are very politicised about what kind of leadership they want.

"I think the dynamics of an Islamist political party are such that you will always have an evolving situation on your hands, and the party needs to evolve positively with this."

On possible contests for the top posts, Dzulkefly said he has heard something of this. However, he declined to say more than that the election will be "meriah" (jovial).

As to the reasons behind the loss of Kedah in GE13, he conceded that PAS had failed to fulfill the aspirations and expectations of the people in the state.

"We have been oblivious. This is not to say the BN is strong in Kedah, since the PAS machinery is also strong.

"The mistake is that the PAS-led Kedah government and leadership should have explained (policies and decisions). They did not go to the ground to explain these. We must admit this fault."

'PAS must learn from experience'

Dzulkefly said the party must learn from this experience and rebuild its machinery to wrest the state back from the BN.

"We expect that Umno will be Umno, and will go back to its bad habits," he noted.

Asked why PAS had not learnt from having lost Terengganu previously, he agreed that this was a question on many lips.

“Why didn’t the PAS central leadership take action (in Kedah)? ... There was no firmness in the central (party) leadership to nip (the Kedah problem) in the bud. (No one was) firm enough to reprimand (the Kedah leaders) and we knew (defeat) was coming (in GE13).”

azlanThe Kedah government, under PAS’ Azizan Abdul Razak (left), went through five tumultuous years after the 2008 general election, with some officials in open disagreement over policies and decisions.

At the same time, ‘progressive’ PAS candidates such as Dzulkefly, deputy president Mohamad Sabu, vice-presidents Husam Musa and Sallehuddin Ayub, lost their respective GE13 campaigns.

Asked if this could be due to internal sabotage, Dzulkefly said he has heard such speculation but dismissed it as being “far fetched and coincidental”.

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