

Let's debate, PKR veep tells Umno Youth chief

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By Terence Netto

PKR vice-president N Surendran wants to shift the focus of an exchange with Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin on the bumiputera economic empowerment programme, the raft of measures Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak announced last week that have evoked a m lange of reactions.

pkr dharmendran dang wangi police 260513 surendran"Instead of us trading broadsides through the media on the constitutionality of the measures, let's debate in public whether or not it is better to tackle poverty eradication in this country through a needs-based approach than a race-centred one," said Surendran (left).

The MP for Padang Serai said a public debate on a theme that avoids the question of constitutionality would reduce the scope for media manipulation of contesting views.

The latter, said Surendran, has already occurred in the instance of Umno mouthpiece Utusan Malaysia's reporting of what the PKR leader had said about the programme in the initial flurry of responses to it.

Surendran criticised the raft of measures, estimated to involve RM30 billion in public funds, as unconstitutional and going beyond the scope for affirmative action for bumiputeras provided for under Article 153 of the federal constitution.

His broadside prompted Khairy, via Utusan Malaysia, to remark that the PKR leader was a threat to the Malays because he questioned the provision for affirmative action under Article 153, an interpretation that Surendran and his party were quick to denounce as calculated to rabble rouse.

"I did not question the need for affirmative action but merely the scope of the provisions under the newly announced measures which in my view go far beyond what is stipulated under Article 153," the lawyer-legislator explained.

NONE"Typically, Utusan Malaysia and surprisingly, Khairy (right), have both resorted to selective quotation of my remarks to make the point that I am a threat to the special position of bumiputeras as outlined in the constitution," Surendran said in elaboration of his point.

"I did no such thing and in an effort to forestall further media manipulation and

selective quotation, I invite Khairy to a debate on the topic that is neutered - how best to eradicate poverty, whether through needs-based or race-centred means," said Surendran.

Surendran said the ball was now in the Umno Youth leader's court, noting that Khairy had in the past been amenable to invitations to joust with his opponents at open forums.

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