

'Umno less believable in kopiah and serban'

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INTERVIEW Sensing that Umno is shifting to the right of the political spectrum, Pulai MP Nur Jazlan Mohamed has urged his party to return to its roots as a centrist party, where its strength lies, instead of pretending to be like PAS.

"Umno people are less believable when they dress up in a kopiah (skull cap) or serban (turban) and go around telling the people they are pious," Nur Jazlan said in an interview on Jan 23.

He said this when asked about criticism that Umno appeared to be trying to become like the Islamic party PAS.

For example, he said, Umno's Kelantan head Mustapa Mohamed (left) has an image of being clean and scandal-free, yet the Malay nationalist party still could not wrest control of the PAS-controlled state.

"We still cannot win Kelantan, even though we tried to dress up, we go to the surau. We still cannot win Kelantan. Why? Because there is a perception that Umno people are not PAS, and should not even pretend to be like PAS leaders.

"People accept them as Umno leaders, as moderates. But the people won't accept them as religious leaders, nor will people in Kelantan will accept PAS leaders as moderates," he explained.

Nur Jazlan said that being a centrist party was why Umno has been successful for decades. It is also why it had sacked its religious bureau in 1951, and ousted its founder Onn Jaafar for proposing that Umno to be opened to all races.

He pointed out that PAS, being a conservative Islamist party, has been shifting into the centre space that Umno vacated, but adds, "Do you think the PAS ulama are really centrists? No way."

Nur Jazlan also opined that Umno is weak in terms of information and research, and said the party should conduct surveys - not armchair analyses - to better understand urban Malays.

He emphasised that these steps should be an empirical study, rather than an

armchair analysis.

Why Umno plays on race, religion

The lack of understanding of the Malays of today is one reason that Umno keeps playing the race and religion card, including the ongoing 'Allah' row that he says is a 'no-win argument'.

"The more Umno talks about race, religion, contracts, bumiputera policies, and others, the more it becomes something that angers non-Malays and non-Muslims, causing them to reject Umno.

"In the peninsula, BN is only left with Umno, so it has to realise that. We can't dominate BN policies with Umno policies alone because even the Malays themselves will reject this," Nur Jazlan said.

He pointed out that urban Malays today exceeded the Malay population of the rural areas, and have a different opinion on current affairs, including issues of race and religion.

Using affirmative action policies as an example, Nur Jazlan said urban Malays want it to be needs-based even if the policy goal is to help bumiputeras, instead of dishing out cash based solely on ethnicity.

The process should also be transparent, he said, so that the people can see where the money is going to.

"If you want to create entrepreneurs, let them be people who are capable, educated, and experienced in the businesses they want to do. You support them, not those who have no idea of business," said Nur Jazlan, who also heads the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee.

While he admitted that his views were of the minority in the party, he nevertheless defended his position.

'My answers may seem idiotic, but...'

"My answers - to many of my colleagues - may seem idiotic. But if you can dispute whatever I say, you must dispute it intelligently.

"You don't ask, 'What kind of a Malay are you?', 'What kind of a Muslim are you?', 'We are going to come to your house and kill you...'

"Am I wrong? If I say urban Malays have changed, am I wrong? And why have they changed? Have you addressed their problems?"

"And don't tell them to go to the mosque and surau, for that is not what they will do, especially the younger generation."

"There are many who go, but then, there are also many who don't go. Then, if you play on religious issues, they don't respond to it," Nur Jazlan said.

To a question on whether he could survive in his own party, Nur Jazlan curtly pointed out that he had contested and lost the Umno Supreme Council post last year, but won uncontested in the divisional polls for the first time.

"So, the people in Umno in my constituency understands what I stand for. The rakyat in my constituency understand that I am for them, so that is more important to me."

"On the fact that I cannot get into the national body, that is the wish of the delegates. I am not upset about it, I am not angry about it because I know that a lot of them do not accept my style – my very open and very hard-hitting style of criticism."

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