

**Pakatan hypocritical on ulama joining Umno**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**July 04, 2010**

Ex-mufti Mohd Asri Zainal Abidin who was hotly rumoured to be joining Umno, has defended - albeit subtly - the right of religious scholars to join the party.

NONE In a ceramah in Bukit Mertajam, Penang on Saturday, Asri (right) ticked off Pakatan Rakyat for condemning the 40 young ulama for joining Umno last month.

According to one of the scholars, the move was to "promote deeper understanding" of Islam to the party's three million odd members.

Asri said Pakatan has not acted wisely when it attacked the ulama in spite of the coalition's claimed support of democracy.

"Since they are advocates for democracy, they should also respect the right (of the ulamas) to associate (with whoever they wish)," Asri told about 150 people at the ceramah.

young ulama join umno 250610 03Asri, who was obviously unhappy with the attacks on his peers had been treated, challenged Pakatan to be consistent with their struggles.

"They should not have double standards when dealing with different cases," he said.

Umno in rut

When asked about his evaluation of Umno's performance since the last election, Asri said Prime Minister and Umno president Najib Abdul Razak appeared to be making an attempt to reform Umno.

"However, as a whole, Umno is not moving forward," he said.

NONE "It is like in the past, there seems to be no change, whether it is their ego or their way of doing things," he added.

Later, Asri hinted that he may act as a 'third force' in raising issues close to the peoples' hearts.

He said further that the rakyat's mind has matured now and will be able to greater appreciate the issues raised by those in the third force, such as himself.

Asri also revealed that he had been asked to form a new party, but rejected the idea as he felt the existing political parties were sufficient.

Asri is no stranger to controversy, but in more ways than one has had to suffer the consequences of his independent thinking.

He currently stands trial for teaching on religion without accreditation.

Recent rumours also surfaced that Asri and his followers contemplated joining Umno in order to escape a purported crackdown against advocates of the puritan Wahhabi school of thought, following intensified police scrutiny of Jemaah Islamiah activities.

Asri subsequently ruled out joining Umno, and said his loyalty was with the truth, regardless of political, ethnic or religious affiliations.

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