

**Khairy: You'd need a death wish to go after Perkasa
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In Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar's short years in politics, he has been caught in the middle of political flare-ups more often than most party veterans.

From his fiery deputy Youth chief days pre-2009, he has never been short of controversy, taking the bull by its horns despite rank or age.

From DAP veteran Lim Kit Siang to former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad - you name them, Khairy's had some kind of spat with them.

But few had as much velocity and force as his most recent jousts with Malay rights NGO Perkasa president, Ibrahim Ali.

What started off as a tiff between Ibrahim and MCA Youth chief Wee Ka Siong over an education scholarship, became an all-out war when Khairy stepped up to defend his BN counterpart.

This, of course, enraged Ibrahim. Both took to the social media and text messaging to fire salvos at each other in just a matter of days, with terms like 'jaguh kampung' (village hero) 'gedebe' (thug) and 'schoolboy', hurled about.

Khairy's disdain for Ibrahim is no secret. But Perkasa is indeed more than just Ibrahim Ali.

Formed just in 2008 when there appeared to be a vacuum in the right-wing Malay rights ideology, Perkasa caught on like wildfire and now has a membership of 50,000, according to Ibrahim.

In the second part of his interview with Malaysiakini, Khairy sheds light on why he thinks that the existence of Perkasa would not mean diminished support for Umno. But at the same time, he muses that it would take a fool to stand up to them.

Perkasa cannibalising Umno members?

While the rising influence of Perkasa has put several Umno leaders in a tizzy, Khairy has insisted that it actually does not mean much in terms of Malay support for Umno.

NONE "I'm not going to lie, I think most of the Perkasa members are from Umno.

"So empirically, these guys are not adding support to Umno, which is why I take a strong stand against them. If Perkasa members really are Umno members, net-net, what support do you gain from Perkasa? Not much.

"They tend not to support the Opposition because they'll vote for Umno anyway. Net-net, the political impact of Perkasa on Umno is minimal because there are no additional Malay voters.

"So when you say 'we have to side them because they bring the Malay votes', I'll have to ask 'what Malay votes are you talking about?' It's the same people who support us. Even if we move to the centre with 1Malaysia, they'll still support us," he said.

But the scenario would be completely different if Perkasa was made into a political party, pushing the members to choose between Perkasa and Umno, said Khairy.

However, the bad still outweighs the good when it comes to Perkasa.

"At the end of the day, the impact of non-Malay votes on Umno and BN, because of Perkasa, is significant. So after some political calculation, at the end of the day, (Perkasa) hemorrhage more votes than they add votes," he said.

Great political risk attached to attacking Perkasa

So considering this scenario, why don't Umno take a stronger stand against Perkasa?

NONE"Good question, I don't know. I think it should," he said after a relatively long pause, drawing parallels with the Christian conservative base in the US Republican party.

"There's great political risk in touching that group of people. You need somebody who is extremely foolish to go after them in Umno, or somebody sure of their position. I'm not particularly sure of my position so I must be foolish.

"It takes a kind of person with a death wish to go after them," said Khairy.

However, he said that it is important now for Umno to show Malaysians that they are different from Perkasa.

But ultimately, it is not up to him.

"I know what the PM thinks of these people. But it's up to him to let the people know what he thinks," he said.

Umno will still be relevant

When asked if Umno will find relevance among Malays, Khairy maintained that Umno's broad appeal will always ensure that there will still be a place for the 74-year-old party in the future political landscape of the party.

"We're like a big tent. We appeal to those who identify with Perkasa, we appeal to the progressive Malays, and even the liberal Malays who feel that the Umno struggle is still relevant.

"We'll always be bigger than Perkasa," he said.

"Right-wing niches grow seasonally. In bad economic times, it thrives. And then when times are good, the centre takes over.

"But it's important for us in Umno to ensure that the niche doesn't grow any more. It's important to make sure that the centre holds," he said.

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