

**Khair: Perkasa 'bigger' than Umno Youth
Malaysiakini.com
September 16, 2010**

XCLUSIVE Defending the interests of Malays and Muslims is the "heart and soul" of Umno, says Mohamad Khir Toyo, the former menteri besar of Selangor.

But of late, he said, it is Malay rights NGOs like Perkasa that "have a greater voice" on such "sensitive issues", indirectly hitting out at Umno Youth, which has traditionally been in the forefront in championing such matters.

Likewise, he defended Perkasa for airing the grouses of the Malay-Muslim community, despite Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin's open distaste for the organisation.

khir toyo interview 150910 Speaking to Malaysiakini earlier this month, Khir (left), however, denied that Umno was "outsourcing this role" to NGOs, saying that this was in fact losing the party ground in some areas.

The need to defend Islam and Malay interests was apparent even now, he said, with Pakatan leaders seemingly emboldened to push the limits, like DAP-Serdang parliamentarian Teo Nie Ching who caught flak for entering a surau in her constituency.

"It is wrong (even if BN did it). Wrong is wrong. Don't be surprised if one day non-Muslims will give sermons. It could happen," he said.

But would planting such ideas be tantamount to political fear-mongering?

"No, this is just a possibility...We need to introduce fear, or else people will take it lightly," he said.

Excerpts from the third part of Malaysiakini's interview with Khir follow, with content edited for language and brevity.

Malaysiakini: You mentioned that BN Selangor's strategy is to go to the ground and engage the rakyat. Can you share how?

Mohamad Khir Toyo: Visit schools and meet with committee members of places of worship. I go to all of them, (Buddhist and Hindu) temples, and this is replicated elsewhere (by BN assemblypersons). If we do this, I believe that we can regain the support of the Chinese.

Speaking of visiting places of worship, how do you feel about the issue of DAP parliamentarian Teo Nie Ching's visit to Surau al-Huda in Serdang?

This is different. The Selangor Fatwa Council has said that non-Muslims have the same status as Muslim women who are having their menses. They are not allowed to enter the prayer hall. That is the fatwa.

NONETeo's case is complicated. She entered the prayer hall when people were performing the tarawih (prayers performed during Ramadan) and she did not (cover her hair).

She is wrong. That's why the Selangor Islamic Council (Mais) sent her a warning letter. What (Kelantan MB and PAS spiritual leader) Nik Aziz (Nik Mat) said may be right in

Kelantan, but Selangor has its own set of fatwa.

I feel worried and sad because religion is no longer a way of life but is a political instrument. I have issues with DAP wanting to give speeches about Islam; just convert and you can say anything about Islam. What's the problem (with this)?

The contention is that it is wrong if Pakatan Rakyat does it, but BN is free to do so.

When did BN do so? During my time (as MB), no MCA members entered mosques. I gave specific instructions (against it).

This may be after your time, but during the Hulu Selangor by-election there was even a ceremony to pray for BN candidate P Kamalanathan.

That I don't know. During my time I was very firm, religion is not a political tool. That's my principle. It is wrong (even if BN does it). Wrong is wrong.

Some feel that the issue of religion, in particular involving the Malays, is used as a last resort to get support and sympathy.

No. Why is it that if we talk about Malays, we are racist, but if we talk about other races it's not racist? That's the question.

Why do you think the issue has been blown up in such a manner?

Do you think (Pakatan leaders) would listen otherwise? This Teo, she would continue to enter mosques if the sultan did not issue a warning. The problem is, this state government cannot be faulted. If this happened and we advised nicely and they listened, it wouldn't be a problem.

This thing has happened. (PKR-Andalas assembly person Dr Xavier Jayakumar) gave a talk in a surau in Andalus. We told him he was wrong, so why did they do it again? Does the state government accept criticism? Are they too arrogant? Don't be surprised if one day non-Muslims will read out sermons. It could happen.

Are you trying to scare people?

It's not like that.

You're saying, "Be worried. One day a non-Muslim would read out sermons. Be scared."

The thing is, we told Xavier nicely, so why do it again?

Are you scare-mongering?

No, this is just a possibility. Don't try to sue me later. This is a possibility.

But you are putting this idea into people's heads...

We need to introduce fear, or else people will take it lightly. This issue should not have involved the sultan. Am I right? This is a basic issue in Islam.

How do you think Pakatan Rakyat is handling issues related to race and religion? For

example, the issue of the relocation of the Hindu temple to Section 23 of Shah Alam, which later led to the demonstration involving a cow head?

The story is this. I have advised the state government to be careful, NONE based on my experience (with the demolishing of the temple in Rimba Jaya). To say that (the Rimba Jaya issue) was my fault, it was actually a court decision. As the MB, I gave the decision to relocate the temple in accordance with court orders, because the case went to the High Court and the appeal was rejected. That was the issue, but it was handled in such a hostile way that people didn't understand.

But I became the victim, accused of instructing the demolition, but that's okay. I was someone who is only acting on instructions.

How has this issue impacted your government?

It was used by the opposition to emotionally influence Indian voters. There was even a video, not just of (the Rimba Jaya temple) but of others too.

When a temple was to be relocated from section 19 to 23, the issue then was objections from Malays. Were they also influenced?

They were not influenced (to act the way they did). Put yourself in their shoes. A non-Muslim place of worship in front of your house, you too would be unhappy. This is not Umno's issue, but of all parties involved.

Do you feel the protest was justified?

For me, places of worship should be built according to need, to protect sensitivities. The protesters did not go against the building of the temple, but just not there, not near a Malay community. That is all, we do not object (to the construction of temples). The issue hasn't been resolved. (Another piece of land) has been allocated but the temple has not been moved. (Pakatan) is burying the issue.

Looking at this protest and another on the same issue in front of the state assembly building, it appears that NGOs are now in the forefront, when it usually has been Umno Youth that championed such matters. Where is Umno Youth?

I think NGOs have more of a voice now.

Why? Do you think Umno Youth should be more active?

I don't know. That question should be posed to the Umno Youth chief, not me. Maybe they have a different strategy, politics is about strategy.

Are you saying Umno is outsourcing this job to NGOs?

It may be that the NGO has more of a voice compared with Umno, and Umno has its own strategy, like trying to grow closer to the people first.

Look at (Malay rights NGO) Perkasa, I think they are playing a greater role in fighting for Malay rights and other things. For Umno, (party president) Najib (Razak) told us to go down to the ground and meet more people. That is our strategy.

How can this be the strategy if the Youth chief himself said that azlanhe will leave the party if Umno supports NGOs like Perkasa?

That's his opinion, I cannot comment on that, people have the right to their own opinion, don't they?

But you support Perkasa because you think they are doing some good?

Perkasa is a place for certain quarters to raise their concerns. It's like (Chinese organisation) Suqiu, which is the place for the community to raise issues on education, their rights. If we are to be an open society, then let it be open. We can't ask Perkasa to shut its mouth, but ask others to open theirs. Let everyone talk.

Is Perkasa taking over Umno's role as the defender of the Malays?

No, it is not. It's like I said, Najib said Umno should go down to the ground, be with the people.

While at the same you don't have to worry about publicly defending Malays, because Perkasa is conveniently covering that already?

I think the PM has his way of dealing with this sensitive issue. We still have a government. We believe that our leaders will not betray the trust of the Umno members. If we trust that our leaders will perform their duties, we don't have to overshadow them.

But you agree that this works in your favour. If the NGOs are doing it, then Umno is off the hook?

I can't really say this is true because we are losing ground in certain areas because of this. Some Malays are not happy with Umno because Umno is not playing a very prominent role in dealing with sensitive issues.

Why has Umno been very quiet when dealing with these issues?

Umno still retains its identity. I don't know, in my speeches I still talk about these things. Umno survives on two things. Firstly, it upholds the struggles of Islam and secondly, it fights for the Malays. This is the heart and soul of Umno.

And now NGOs are taking over Umno's role...

Yes, I've heard this too. We shall see, because we need to tread carefully when it comes to these things.

Do you think Perkasa is using the race and religion cards?

No, it speaks on the basis of the federal constitution. If it is using race and religion, then it will use temples to speak on Hindusim. Then it is wrong, just like Teo Nie Ching. If you have not converted to that religion then you shouldn't talk about it. Am I right?

Does this happen because many Malay leaders in Pakatan Rakyat are more tolerant?

Tolerance and understanding are two different things. It's problematic when you tolerate but don't understand religion. At Surau al-Huda, they didn't understand the fatwa. I don't

blame Teo but those who invited her. As part of the surau committee, they have a duty to know and adhere to the fatwa.

Surau administrations are also said to be victims of politics.

That's true, and it saddens me. In my constituency, people voted for the nazir (chairperson) but only the person who came in third in the number of votes was appointed. Najib wanted to pray at the Kampung Medan mosque but he was rejected. A Muslim wanting to pray, and turned away.

(Shah Alam PAS parliamentarian) Khalid Samad was the one who NONERaised the issue, and he revealed the request was rejected as it was made under Umno's name.

So he should have advised them of this and ask them to request under an NGO's name. You can't just reject it because the prime minister is coming.

It sounds like you are using NGOs as a front...

It's the state policy (that political parties cannot use mosques and surau for their activities).

But is it the case that, as you say, it's not right for political parties to speak on religion and race because it may be viewed as politicising the matter, so you ask the NGOs to voice this out on your behalf?

(Umno) will talk as long as it is about defending the interests of Malays and Islam, Umno will speak up. I'm still talking about the same thing.

I don't know about other leaders, but for me Articles 152 (on the national language) and 153 (on the special position of Malays and other natives) of the federal constitution must be protected. Whether you like it or not, this is part of the constitution.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/142776>