

Khairy and the 'perception' of power
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In politics, the term 'perception' is important.

In the case of Umno Youth deputy chief Khairy Jamaluddin, he is perceived to be 'powerful' in the government and Umno as he is the son-in-law of Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

And this 'perception' appears to hold water.

It is said that after the 2004 general elections, Khairy managed to convince Abdullah, who is also Umno president, to permit younger leaders to hold important posts in the central and state leadership.

Following this, several younger leaders moved up the ladder. For example in Kedah, Umno Youth information chief Azmi Daim was appointed as a state exco.

Whereas former Umno Youth exco Dr Zamry Abd Kadir was appointed as Perak exco and Dr Adham Baba was made Parliamentary Secretary of Higher Education Ministry.

The 'perception' among the public, and especially within the Umno circle, is that Khairy was behind the appointments. As far as they are concerned, the 31-year-old Oxford graduate can influence the prime minister.

The younger generation in Umno considers this as a meaningful victory for Khairy, particularly for the future leadership of the Youth wing.

In view of this, Khairy will not face any obstacles in winning the Umno Youth chief post uncontested. Even the incumbent, Hishammuddin Hussein, has promised this to his deputy in the coming party polls.

The fourth floor

The old guards in Umno and the government consider Khairy a 'threat' but the younger generation see him as someone capable of 'opening doors' for them to tread along the corridors of power.

The old guards are also concerned about the existence of 'advisers and strategists' spearheaded by Khairy on the fourth floor of the Prime Minister's Office. This group is said to be responsible for all the decisions made by the government.

According to a source close to Umno, these 'perceptions' are helping Khairy move up the party hierarchy with ease.

The latest 'perception' is that he is preparing a list of young leaders to be named as Umno candidates for the coming general elections.

"Some of the things happened because of Khairy's efforts, but there are also those that happened coincidentally, but Khairy gets the name," said the source.

Furthermore, he said, as Abdullah's son-in-law, Khairy is in the prime minister's 'family circle' and therefore privy to much information unknown to outsiders.

"It is because of this, that Khairy is perceived to be more in the know and more matured than the rest, including in administrating the country.

"Whatever Khairy says becomes reality eventually. This has led certain quarters to believe that it is his idea and the prime minister accepted it," he added.

The source said such 'perceptions' are not fair to Abdullah or his son-in-law himself, but this is what makes Khairy attractive to the younger generation.

He believes that Khairy's actions are more towards helping his father-in-law, who does not have a strong support base in Umno compared to Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

Like a candle

Najib has successfully built a solid support network among the elites and the grassroots because of his applaudable political career since becoming Umno Youth chief in the early 90s.

He was never contested against until he became vice-president, for which he secured the highest number of votes. He is now the party's deputy president.

As a Youth leader, Najib netted the support of the younger generation and by being the son of the late Umno president and prime minister Tun Abdul Razak, he also won over the hearts of the veterans.

On the other hand, Abdullah's political career appeared to be in a state of limbo until former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad appointed him as deputy prime minister after the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim.

"It is certain that Khairy does not want Abdullah to suffer the same fate as the late Ghafar Baba who was appointed deputy prime minister after Musa Hitam had resigned," said the source.

In the absence of strong grassroots support and the lack of any effort to achieve this, Ghafar was defeated by Anwar, he added.

"Therefore, it is vital for Khairy to establish a formidable support network in order for Abdullah to continue administering the party and country," he pointed out.

It is because of this, the source said, that some have likened Khairy to a candle "which burns itself to provide light for others."

Must be cautious

He said Khairy has also been likened to the fable hero Hang Nadim who saved Singapore from being destroyed by a swordfish.

"The people were told to form a human wall to defend the island from the attacks of the swordfish but they all perished. Ten-year-old Hang Nadim then suggested to the king to use a

banana tree trunk to stop the swordfish.

"The king, who was impressed with the boy's intelligence, invited him to the palace in order to receive an award. But many of the noblemen did not like Hang Nadim as they were worried that when the boy grows older, he would seize power from the king," he added.

The king, when informed of this, became enraged, and ordered the boy to be killed.

"For certain quarters, this is only a fable, but this is a tale rich in hidden meanings. So Khairy must be cautious. One wrong move and he may suffer the fate of Hang Nadim," warned the source.

On the same note, there are also those who feel that Khairy is doing all this to realise his own political ambitions. They claim that he has great goals, including becoming prime minister some day.

The coming general election will provide a clue as to which 'perception' is true.

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