

Can Khairy reinvent himself?
Malaysiakini.com
Apr 14, 2008
Ong Kian Ming and Oon Yeoh

analysis There has been much speculation on the political future of Khairy Jamaludin in the aftermath of the 2008 General Elections.

It can be said that Khairy's first reinvention was to recast himself as a Malay ultra. He clearly felt that because of his Oxford education and Westernised upbringing he was not Malay enough for Umno Youth. So, he decided to build up his street credentials, so to speak.

tun razak seminar 150607 khairyTo do this, he took a page straight out of the Dr Mahathir Mohamad playbook, which is to take on the role of a Malay ultra. This is familiar ground, trodden by Anwar Ibrahim and Najib Razak in their rise as Umno Youth leaders.

This might seem like the right strategy given the culture of Umno Youth. In fact, nothing less would have been expected of him by his peers. But Khairy could have been bolder and adopted a Blue Ocean strategy to become the first liberal and progressive leader to emerge from Umno Youth. What a breath of fresh air that would have been.

His decision to take the path of least resistance probably had a self-fulfilling impact on Khairy's political outlook. In playing the role of the ultra, he surrounded himself with those of the same ilk within Umno Youth. He probably ended up actually buying into the whole 'Ketuanan Melayu' concept although it was at odds with his liberal upbringing.

Is it too late for Khairy to reinvent himself and break away from the ultra image he worked so hard to acquire? Dr M – the original ultra – managed to do so. So did Anwar and Najib.

Strategies for Khairy

We looked at four possible reinvention strategies and examined each option in turn.

parliament briefing 030408 tian chua khairy jamaluddinHis first option is to give up his political ambitions temporarily and to work behind the scenes to help Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi implement the reforms he promised in 2004 but never delivered. This, however, may not even be an option as Abdullah's days as the PM seem to be numbered.

Khairy's second option is to give up his political ambitions to focus on helping various social organisations. He would remain as an MP but he would recast himself, through his non-political activities, as someone who works for the benefit of all Malaysians. Such an initiative would have to be sustained for many years in order to be credible.

His third option would be to reinvent himself as a reformist within Umno and to boldly contest for Umno Youth chief as a reformist candidate. Such a U-turn would be far too drastic and too sudden. It would ring hollow not only amongst Umno Youth members but also members of the public.

His fourth option would be to recast himself as a reformist not within Umno, but as a

member of the opposition PKR. The rationale for doing so is that Pakatan Rakyat could very well form the next government. However, it's hard to imagine this happening given the nasty remarks he has made about Anwar as well as the intense dislike of him among DAP and PAS leadership.

ijok by election nomination supporters fight 200407 khairyOut the four options, we feel the second one seems like the best bet for Khairy. This option gives him the most time to change his image. He could channel his business and networking skills towards organising and implementing programmes which are seen to benefit all Malaysians regardless of race. He would then be able to show, through his good works, that he is capable of being a leader who represents the interests of all ethnic groups.

Reinvention is never an easy thing for anyone to do but Khairy has one big problem which will hinder his progress: himself. Unlike Anwar, who was unceremoniously stripped of his position as deputy prime minister and finance minister and subsequently spent six years in jail, Khairy is still financially wealthy and is in no danger of going to prison, at least not yet.

Of course, one can have a change of heart without needing to go to prison. The realisation that one has done something wrong can arise from many sources – friends, family, religion – and people can and do change for the better. Can Khairy?

Anakin Skywalker or Darth Vader?

This is where we disagree. Oon is of the opinion that Khairy has got no where to go as far as reinvention is concerned. If he remains an ultra, he will continue to be despised, but if changes his stripes, no one will believe him. Unless, of course, he's willing to transform himself over the course of 20 to 25 years, like Dr M before him did.

Kian Ming is more hopeful as Khairy is only in his early 30s and has his whole life ahead to reinvent himself, ideally in a way that is driven more by personal convictions than political expediency.

So, will Khairy turn back to being Anakin Skywalker or will he remain as Darth Vader? The jury is still out on this one.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news//81305>