

Hisham apologises for keris act
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Umno Youth chief Hishammuddin Hussein today apologised for MCPX raising the keris "if it had affected the non-Malays".

He said that he took full responsibility for his actions but gave no guarantee that he would not repeat the keris-waving again during this year's Umno annual general assembly.

bn youth meeting at pwtc 250408 05"I am sorry if it had affected the non-Malays," he told reporters after attending a Barisan Nasional (BN) Youth meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

At the same time, he also apologised to the Malays over his "failure to uphold the Malay symbol (keris)".

The values of the keris is not what has been portrayed by certain factions but the "current realities" (election results) show otherwise, he explained.

"I'm not a vain and arrogant person and I can accept this. This is also a sad lesson for me but if the politics of today say otherwise, I've to accept it," said Hishammuddin, who is also BN Youth chief.

"The struggles of BN is ultimately more important than myself and we cannot indulge in actions which will frighten other races," he added. "This is a realisation that we've come to today in our meeting after one-and-a-half months of soul-searching."

But when asked if keris-waving would be discontinued at this year's Umno Youth assembly, Hishammuddin replied, "This is not the forum to discuss that."

However, one reporter got the minister red-faced when he asked Hishammuddin how he could contest for Umno vice-presidency (as speculated) if he couldn't defend the keris in Umno Youth.

The visibly upset Hishammuddin turned around to the other Youth leaders to ask them if he had failed and laughed off the matter saying, "It's just a matter of perception."

Struggles must change

Hishammuddin's keris-raising act has been seen by many as one of the factors in the non-Malays voting away from Barisan Nasional in the March 8 general election.

umno 2007 pemuda keris 061107 groupThe education minister had raised the keris during the Umno Youth assemblies for the past three years, claiming that it symbolised Malay supremacy and Umno's role in defending that.

After the youth wing's annual assembly last year, he had also defended his actions, calling the keris a symbol of strength.

Before the question-and-answer session, he told reporters that after a lot of soul-searching, the BN youth wings had reached a consensus on some of the reasons for the ruling coalition's unprecedented setback in the elections.

Among the matters discussed, said Hishammuddin, was the question of how the respective movements can defend their parties' struggles without offending others.

"The recent elections revealed that BN's struggles must change. And this is an awareness understood by the youth sections."

He said that the movements can also no longer rely on rhetoric as they are not a new faction. The education minister also said that there were certain actions people found unacceptable even after 50 years of Independence.

"Although, we still won the elections, we've heard the people's voices and learnt some of our weaknesses," said Hishammuddin. "If we don't change, we stand to suffer even bigger defeats in the future."

Bigger role for East Malaysia

Besides the 'keris' issue, the meeting also discussed the contributions of their East Malaysia counterparts.

"The recent elections have shown that they (East Malaysia) have become the backbone for BN and we need to re-position them more centrally," said Hishammuddin.

"There is a lot for us in the Peninsular to learn from Sabah and Sarawak in terms of racial and religious harmony and how they have proven the strength of BN in their victories."

Placing them more centrally within the national youth movement should not be viewed as just an extra cabinet post or more oil royalties but also reflective of many East Malaysians' hopes, said Hishammuddin.

The new political realities also present an opportunity for Sabah and Sarawak to play a more vital role in national politics, he added.

Meetings among the component party youth sections will be held every two weeks to discuss ways to revitalise their grassroots support, said the BN youth chief.

MCA pleased

Meanwhile, MCA Youth chief Liow Tiong Lai said that they were hopeful that the keris-wielding act will end.

bn youth meeting at pwtc 250408 06After the press conference, Liow said that his youth wing was pleased that Hishammuddin had decided to apologise for the matter.

"This is an important change," said Liow, who also described the apology as a "brave act".

When asked to comment on MCA president Ong Ka Ting's statement saying that "ketuanan Melayu" was inappropriate in today's politics, he said: "MCA as a BN component does not like to play up racial politics."

"But MCA is for multi-racial policies although it's a communal party. MCA's ambition is to defend all races because BN defends all races."

Hindraf 5

When met after the meeting, MIC Youth head SA Vigneswaran reiterated the movement's call for the government to review the Internal Security Act (ISA) detention of five Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) leaders.

sa vigneswaranVigneswaran explained that while the initial arrest was warranted, the longer the issue (their detention) persists the worse it would be for MIC.

"People on the ground think that they (Hindraf 5) were punished for voicing their sentiments.

"For 50 years, MIC and BN have been solving the community's problems. But because of this detention, all our service has gone down the drain," said Vigneswaran.

But while the MIC youth leader explained their stand on the issue at the BN Youth meeting, no consensus was reached on the matter.

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