

There are limits to freedom, warns Khairy

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians should not abuse the freedom they have to openly debate and criticise issues.

Deputy Umno Youth head Khairy Jamaluddin said he was all for the open atmosphere, where government policies and leaders could be criticised by the media and where issues could be discussed, but worried that there were certain limits that needed to be adhered to.

"This openness is good for today's political climate but we have to approach it ethically and wisely.

"We cannot push it too far, too soon, as we are still a maturing democracy.

"Racial sensitivities still exist and we should respect these boundaries," he said after opening the People's Progressive Party Youth wing convention at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday.

Khairy said the government could revert to a more controlled atmosphere if certain people chose to abuse this freedom.

He hoped the few people who were bent on testing the

limits would not be too extreme, as this would prompt restrictions.

"I feel they should not sacrifice the positive atmosphere we have now just for the sake of fulfilling their own agendas.

"That is why Umno Youth will come down hard on those who breach the limits and ignore the boundaries of the law and racial sensitivities."

Earlier in his speech, Khairy said it had been an especially challenging year for Umno as many racial and religious controversies had sprung up during the past 12 months.

However, he said, he was impressed with the way the government had dealt with such charged issues, such as the Interfaith Commission, the findings by the Asian Strategic Leadership Institute on Bumiputera equity ownership, and the SMS which claimed a mass baptism for Muslims was being held in a church in Ipoh.

He said the BN leadership had shown rationality, wisdom and moderation when tackling the issues without detracting from the main focus of

unity among Malaysians.

PPP Youth chief T. Murugiah said the wing's resolutions this year included asking the BN leadership for four parliamentary seats and 12 state assembly seats in the next elections.

Murugiah said the party, which had grown to 500,000 members, should be given the opportunity to prove itself.

Barisan Nasional Wanita chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who opened the convention for the women's wing, said there was a need to change the approaches taken to solve issues.

"Irrelevant and outdated approaches should be discarded and new and more effective ways have to be adopted," she said.

Rafidah said women should have a wider view of issues and be aware of what was important to society.

"They should also bear in mind global and regional perspectives in solving issues."

The delegates later touched on various issues, including the Ah Long problem, difficulty in getting bank loans, unity and Mat Rempit.