

Dissent no longer allowed in Umno, says Abdul Kadir

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 2 — Tan Sri Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir laments Umno's present disdain for dissent and open debate, charging it as a "regression" from the eras of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj and Tun Abdul Razak.

The former Umno minister and supreme council member told *The Malaysian Insider* he was "worried" about the Malay party's current political culture, saying it starkly contrasted with the Najib administration's push for transparency and openness.

"Unfortunately things have changed a lot within Umno since the times of the late Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Razak and Tun Hussein Onn. Back then there was a lot of freedom to voice out our opinions, a lot of room for dissent and open debate..

"But now you don't have that kind of environment," Abdul Kadir told *The Malaysian Insider*, citing the current circumstances has pushed him to join Angkatan Amanah Merdeka (Amanah) where he can voice out issues that could not within his own party.

The former tourism minister cited the backlash to Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah's stand on the Bersih 2.0 rally, where the deputy higher education minister disagreed with the way the government had handled the July 9 event.

"It was just a comment, it did not mean he was going against his party or the government, but now there are calls within Umno for him (Saifuddin) to be sacked.

"This never happened in the past," added Abdul Kadir.

He also compared the present Umno leadership to the past ones, and used the case of former Umno Youth Chief and Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Harun Idris to illustrate his point.

"Most of us in Umno Youth did not agree when Datuk Harun was charged with corruption. We became witnesses against the government back then. We went against our own government to campaign for Datuk Harun around the country...but no action was taken against us, even though there was a difference of opinion.

"It did not mean we were going against BN or the government, it was just a difference of opinion," said Abdul Kadir.

Between 1975 to 1977, the late Harun was found guilty on various charges of corruption and was sentenced to six years' jail. In 1981, Harun was pardoned by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on advice of the then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed, after serving three years of his sentence.

Despite his lament about the party's current mood, Abdul Kadir said that he would remain with Umno and work for the party.

"My whole adult life, I have been with Umno, I am still holding positions within the party...there are a lot of things that I agree with Umno, with some of its other policies," said the veteran politician who is currently treasurer for the Kulim Bandar-Baharu Umno division.

Abdul Kadir is now one of three deputy presidents of Amanah, led by former finance minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah who remains Gua Musang Umno division chief and the Gua Musang MP.

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