

**Drop feudal mentality to survive, Asri tells BN**  
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**By Yow Hong Chieh**

KUALA LUMPUR, July 15 — The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) must get rid of its paternalistic manner and feudal culture to adapt to new challenges such as the Bersih 2.0 movement, influential cleric Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin said.

The former Perlis mufti said the excessive number of yes-men in BN meant that the rational voices of “people with ideas” which could help solve the ruling coalition’s problems were drowned out and could not survive long enough to influence policy.



“Everyone wants to show that they’re loyal (to the leadership), even if a given statement is very stupid,” he said at the “Post-9th July Sharing Session” Forum here last night.

“Many enter politics because they want to please their leaders in the hope that they’ll get something out of that,” Asri **(picture)** added.

A large crowd turned up at the forum convened by outspoken Umno supreme council member and Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, who has said BN could have handled the issue better.

Electoral reform coalition Bersih 2.0 estimated that some 50,000 turned up for the July 9 rally despite a total lockdown of the capital city but police said only 6,000 people took part. Some 1,600 were arrested but released within the day.

Now an academic, Asri pointed out that the eagerness of BN leaders to defer to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has also led to the erosion of national institutions like the police force.

He cited the discovery of weapons and Bersih T-shirts by the police in the run-up to last Saturday’s rally, which he suggested were planted.

“Even my old mom thought that was an obvious lie even though she saw it on TV and doesn’t read (news on) the Internet,” he said.

The popular Islamic scholar said this undue influence over key institutions also extended to mosques, which were used by the Najib administration to propagate religious arguments backing the official line that Bersih was haram (forbidden).

Asri urged the government to cease acting like a father trying to frighten his grown-up child with tired, old ghost stories that no longer have any effect.

"Times have changed. This isn't the Seventies. People can access information that the government cannot block," he said, in an apparent reference to the attempt by authorities to link Bersih to the communists.

"The government must find those with ideas to solve problems and not those good at sucking up," Asri said.

Also present at the session were Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin, MCA vice-president Senator Gan Ping Sieu, Association for the Promotion of Human Rights (Proham) committee member Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria and Institute of Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) chief executive Wan Saiful Wan Jan.

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