

**Khairy, now Najib's emerging star**  
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**By The Malaysian Insider**

ANALYSIS, June 14 - Not too long ago, he was sidelined by the Umno-owned media, vilified as a member of the infamous Fourth Floor and deemed untrustworthy by the Najib administration.

All in all, he was headed for political mediocrity.

Not anymore. Today, Khairy Jamaluddin is the go to guy for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak. Appointed Minister of Youth and Sports, he has also been named government spokesman of international media. In return, the son-in-law of former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Badawi has become a loyal cheerleader for the PM at a time when there is roiling debate on the PM's strategy and performance at GE13 and growing discourse on whether there should a no-contest for the top Umno position at the coming polls.

It is notable that many Umno bloggers with a fondness for the Mahathir era have called for contest for the top two positions and The Malaysian Insider has learnt that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has also communicated to Najib the need for democracy to thrive in Umno. In contrast, the mainstream media, under direction from Putrajaya, has been sourcing comments and quotes from the likes of Khairy and other Umno politicians supporting a no-contest, a move which will keep Najib as Umno president.

Sources in Putrajaya told The Malaysian Insider that in addition to being close to Najib, Khairy now enjoys good ties with the First Lady, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, a seismic change from sometime ago.

So how did the change from outcast to insider happen? Government officials say that Najib's camp were initially wary of Khairy's ambitious streak and political allegiance. The PM's advisors also were mindful of Mahathir's antipathy towards Khairy and Abdullah, with the former PM believing that his legacy was damaged by the Pak Lah-Khairy combo.

But Khairy hunkered down and just concentrated on political programmes, stayed below the radar and made it clear that his loyalty was to Najib. His upward fortunes have also been helped by the fact that he was one of a few BN politicians who emerged from the polls with a commanding majority and with a rare commodity in Umno these days: the ability to speak and write proficiently in English.

Najib's advisors also believe that in the run-up to the party polls, it will be important to bring as many "fighters and orators" into his camp, especially if there is a challenge to the top position in the party. This thinking explains why the likes of Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, Datuk Tajudin Rahman, Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Mansor, Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz were rewarded with positions as ministers and deputy ministers.

Khairy, apart from being given the task of putting together programmes to win over younger Malaysians and help cobble together a better image for Malaysia in international media, is also expected to shore up support for the PM among Umno politicians who will be voting in the party polls in October. By giving Khairy a place at the main table, there is also a hope that Umno politicians loyal to Abdullah Badawi will also fall in line and throw their support behind Najib.

As a political strategy and a reward system for a politician who has stayed the course, promoting Khairy is sound. But it is also a path fraught with some craters.

The Umno Youth chief is still persona no grata on Mahathir's list and his higher profile may provoke a stinging response from the former PM, a complication Najib and Umno can do without.

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