

DAP: Politicians are underestimating Malays
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DAP's Liew Chin Tong says Malays and Malaysians can see through racial and religious politics.

PETALING JAYA: DAP national political education director Liew Chin Tong believes the commotion over PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang's shariah bill and Umno's back and forth on whether to table it, are just attempts to distract the Malays from other issues.

Speaking at a seminar on late PAS leader Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat organised by Amanah last weekend, Liew said the nation had wasted more than three years arguing about Hadi's bill.

"This (Hadi's bill) is essentially a helpful tool for Umno to distract the people from corruption, mismanagement and mega scandals.

"In fact, the hudud and RUU355 non-issue has given Umno both the time and lifeline needed to consolidate its power," he said, referring to the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act (Act 355) by its Malay acronym.

Liew said, however, that the Malay-Muslim society was far more "sophisticated" than most politicians would like to think.

"Many politicians, including the Malay leaders, believe that Malays are close-minded, afraid of change, and can't think for themselves. I strongly disagree with this negative view.

"I am confident the Malays, together with other Malaysians, can and will see through racial and religious politics which are being recycled on a daily basis. I am sure the Malays are not easily swayed by the old dirty games."

Liew said the politicians themselves were in fact the biggest problem when it came to the country's development.

"I believe politicians must offer hope, vision and policy solutions for a contemporary society to match the aspirations of a new generation and a more knowledgeable and sophisticated audience.

“We can rise to the occasion to lead with better ideas. We need to have ideas that work, ideas that can improve lives, and ideas that show Islam is not merely an ideal but something that is beneficial and fair to all, including non-Muslims.”

Speaking about PAS' former spiritual adviser Nik Aziz, who died in February 2015, Liew said it would be difficult to replace him.

“When we revisit the legacies of Nik Aziz, it is important to note his ever-expanding reach of influence and engagement. Post-2008, Nik Aziz was even seen as an icon among the non-Malays.

“Leaders and parties have to grow together with their voters and bring them to scale greater heights in achieving a better society through leadership, principles and some doses of pragmatism.

“Mixing high moral authority, strategic clarity and principled pragmatism, Tok Guru has left big shoes to fill.”

Hadi's private member's bill was first tabled in the Dewan Rakyat in May 2016.

It seeks to increase the maximum punishment for shariah law offenders to 30 years' jail, 100 lashes of the cane, and RM100,000 in fines compared to the current maximum of three years' jail, six lashes and RM5,000.

Last month, Prime Minister Najib Razak revealed that the government would not table the bill but would leave it to the Dewan Rakyat speaker to decide whether to give priority to the bill to be tabled as a private member's bill.

This was an about-turn as less than two weeks earlier, Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi had announced that the government would take over the private member's bill from Hadi.

Last Thursday, Dewan Rakyat Speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia made an abrupt decision to defer debate on the bill until the next sitting, provoking protests from the opposition.

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