

Race politics is out, warns Hishammuddin

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■ Reports by

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It happens every year. The strong language. The powerful posturing. The vein-busting delivery.

The only difference this year: Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein spoke with even more fire and intensity than usual as he aimed his guns at chauvinism and those he said were challenging the position of Islam.

He was tapping a reservoir of anger over moves by non-Muslim groups to discuss freedom of religion and what Youth movement members see as a growing tendency by non-Malays to discuss sacred issues like the special privileges for Bumiputeras.

Much of his 90-minute keynote speech at the Youth assembly was directed at groups trying to debate issues and create controversies in relation to Islam.

"This is a warning from the youth movement. Do not raise any issues in relation to Article 11 and Article 121 (1A) of the Constitution. If negative efforts like this are not stopped, the implications are going to be big," he said, drawing robust cheers and applause.

The thunderous best came next when Hishammuddin spoke about Islam and its place in Malaysia.

"Only the Syariah courts should be allowed to hear and judge cases involving Islam, not the civil courts," he said, referring to the vexing question of juris-

diction which arose after the death of a former army commando.

Hishammuddin made it clear that the Inter-Faith Commission did not have a place in the Malaysian scheme of things.

"At this assembly we urge the government to reject the Inter-Faith Commission," he said, adding that it was like a challenge to accepted norms and practices amid a liberal climate fostered by the government.

This liberalism, he said, was being exploited by these groups without taking into account its impact on race relations.

"Criticism which should be constructive has become increasingly vindictive, fostering hatred, and full of bad intention. Some of them even use the space provided to slander, spread rumours and incite."

Hishammuddin also warned the component parties in the Barisan Nasional not to fall prey to narrow political thinking and chauvinism.

"We must remember that creating a Malaysian nation will not be possible on narrow thinking and chauvinism. Don't gamble the future by championing race politics.

"We know them, we know where they are and we know what they are saying. We are not afraid to face these opportunist leaders and will not compromise

with them," he said to roars of approval.

Later, when asked about his speech commenting on the component parties, Hishammuddin said he was referring to the relationship that "we have with the majority of our component parties which was very good".

"It's a warning to both sides actually that beneath the surface, it's still very fragile and we should not allow the process of whatever freedom to affect us.

"So really, the speech is to warn not only those outside but also to remind ourselves that matters relating to religion and peace is something not to be messed around with."

Hishammuddin did not believe that his speech would damage his relationship with other component parties.

"Yes, and there will be times in the future that it is going to get worse and there will be times in future where it will get better but as far as my relationship with the Youth heads of the component parties, they will know exactly what I mean in my speech today."

He said they realised whatever he had said was not personal.

"They know where I come from and as far as my relationship at the top level is concerned, we have a sincere relationship that we can work on," he said.

Less clear will be how other Malaysians respond to his strong language.