

Najib's 'Chinese tsunami' remark aimed at Umno polls?

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By Wong Teck Chi

COMMENT When Prime Minister and Umno president Najib Abdul Razak blamed Sunday's election result on a "Chinese tsunami", he could have had the coming Umno leadership election in mind.

The Umno election was put off by the party congress in December 2011 to prepare for the 13th general election.

NONEDespite winning at the federal level and wresting back Kedah, the ruling coalition led by Umno won less parliamentary and state seats compared with the 2008 general election. It also failed to win back the resource-rich Selangor state.

This situation, party observers say, could well lead to an internal revolt against Najib in the coming party election.

However, there are yet to be signs of any formidable force that will pressure Najib to step down, like what his predecessor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi faced after the March 8, 2008 general election.

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who remains influential within Umno, then led the call for Abdullah to step down. This time, however, he did not comment on whether Najib should continue led the party.

Nevertheless, Mahathir, the country's longest serving Umno president and prime minister, told a press conference on Tuesday that he did not expect Najib to do worse than Abdullah in this general election.

NONEMahathir also said Najib might face some criticism and rejection from within Umno.

The party election rules were also relaxed in 2009 and now an Umno member need only be a one-term divisional committee member in order to contest for the party presidency. This could open the door wider for Najib to be challenged in the coming party poll.

Also, the changes made to Umno's voting system since its last election will allow the party president's fate to be decided by more than 100,000 members, instead of the 2,500-odd delegates to the party general assembly.

By blaming the May 5 election result on a "Chinese tsunami" and highlighting the fact that Umno has improved its performance by winning nine more parliamentary seats, Najib will have a stronger case in fending off a possible challenge in the coming party election.

At a press conference on Tuesday, Najib dismissed suggestions the election result exposed an "urban-rural divide", pointing out BN also made some gains in urban seats.

He also said that the Chinese community had been "taken for a ride" by the opposition and was under the impression that their votes could trigger a change in government.

Not an 'offhand' remark

Asked about this position taken by Najib, political commentator Tang Ah Chai told Malaysiakini he considered Najib's "Chinese tsunami" remark to be a strategic move for the coming Umno election.

"I think Najib is strategically moving his poor performance in the general election to the Chinese community, and it does not come out as an offhand remark," Tang said.

PAS central committee member Dr NONEDzulkefly Ahmad (left) also concurred, saying that it was Najib's move to "try to unite the Malays" within the party.

"Yes, (it is) of course (for the Umno election). Najib is playing to the gallery (by blaming) the Chinese, to get the applause and to try to unite the Malays."

Dzulkefly went on to criticise the position taken by Najib as "full of hypocrisy", since the BN chief was promoting his 1Malaysia slogan before the general election to woo Chinese and Indian voters.

"We (Pakatan Rakyat) failed to win over Putrajaya, but we do not attribute it to any particular race."

Dzulkefly also dismissed the claim that only Chinese voters backed the opposition in this election, pointing out that Pakatan would not have won 44 of the 56 state seats in Selangor if it did not get the support of Malay community.

Scare tactics have no more effect

Najib's "Chinese tsunami" remark, which was followed by Umno-owned Utusan Malaysia's controversial front page report titled "Apa lagi Cina mahu?" (What more do the Chinese want?), is also seen as a move to scare Chinese Malaysians in order to defuse strong anti-BN sentiments among the community.

Provocations also came from bloggers. Umno-linked blogger Papagomo was arrested by police two days ago for making controversial anti-Chinese postings.

NONETang (right), who is also Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall chief executive officer, holds the view that these attacks do not have much effect on Chinese community, which is now eagerly looking forward for change.

"When there was talk about a change of government during the 2008 general election, the Chinese were quite reluctant to support it. But, their thinking has changed since then, and the Islamic state and May 13 issue threats did not have much effect in this 13th election.

"Even if there was an effect, it would have been a negative effect of greater dissatisfaction with the government," Tang said

Unlike in the past, he said, the Chinese community showed greater enthusiasm in this general election, and they were also more organised in the hope for a change in the country.

This was a positive development and it should not be viewed negatively by Najib and BN, Tang added.

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