

## **MP: Hisham's keris-waving 'tipping point' for Chinese**

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**By Ram Anand**

INTERVIEW Umno vice-president Hishammuddin Hussein's infamous keris-waving incident during the Umno Youth meet in 2005 was a tipping point that caused the Chinese support base shift from BN to the opposition, said DAP's Kluang MP Liew Chin Tong.

Speaking during an interview with Malaysiakini last week, Liew said that up until July 2005, there were "very few" middle-class Chinese who were unhappy with BN, mainly because of former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Vision 2020 agenda.

umno agm 250309 hishammuddin wield keris 03"There was very little racial talk in the party due to the Vision 2020 framework, which included a place for all races. There was a Bangsa Malaysia approach," he said.

"In the 1980s and 1990s, the Chinese community were satisfied because the government opened up avenues (for them). The concept was that if they can pay, they can get education.

"If you can pay, you can get into a private university, if you can pay, you can get Chinese channels in Astro," he said.

But when Hishammuddin waved and kissed the keris in 2005, Liew said Umno reignited racial sentiments in the country.

"From there on Umno turned right, and it was not a very smart move. No coalition in this country can rule without winning across communities. And if you look at it, Umno is still able to rule because Pakatan (Rakyat) failed to win in Sabah and Sarawak," he added.

He said non-Malay disenchantment with the ruling government has been "increasing by the day" until it culminated in the 2008 general election, where BN was denied its customary two-thirds majority.

1Malaysia branding akin to 'cheap food'

The results of the 2008 general election prompted Hishammuddin to apologise to non-Malays for his keris-waving act.

One month after the elections in 2008, Hishammuddin admitted that his action might have affected the party's performance, where BN had only won 140 federal seats and lost many urban, Chinese-dominated seats to the emerging Pakatan.

"(Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak) tried to bridge that with his 1Malaysia concept, but that has become a branding exercise for cheap food," Liew said.

"Nowadays, PAS is being seen as being more moderate than Umno."

NONELiew (left), who is DAP political strategist, also argued that the rise of political awareness among the Chinese youth began long before this year's general election.

"The Chinese youth, I think, have swung to Pakatan in 2008. 2008 was a Chinese youth phenomena. But this election, other age groups among the Chinese community had also shifted to Pakatan," he said.

He said that the issues involving Teoh Beng Hock's death and the Lynas rare earth plant had greatly affected the support among the Chinese community, while also noting that social media sites such as Facebook "plays a big role".

"Before this, it was the men who were participating in political discourse. Now, with Facebook, you have women participating in the political discourse as well," he added.

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