

PM's silence made Dr M look right
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's refusal to counter his predecessor's scathing criticisms gave the impression that Dr Mahathir Mohamad was speaking the truth.
MCPX

Stating that the prime minister was wrong in keeping quiet, Gerakan advisor Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the criticisms eventually had an impact on the March 8 polls.

abdullah ahmad badawi mahathir "Mahathir's (criticism) has in a way affected them (Umno and Barisan Nasional). He may be a single ordinary citizen but he is a super citizen because he has been PM for 22 years.

"If the leadership of Pak Lah and Umno feels that Mahathir is wrong and what he says is wrong, they have every right to expel him and not be worried.

"Tell the rakyat what he said is wrong. If he keeps on saying things and you don't respond, then whatever he's saying must be right," he told Malaysiakini in an exclusive interview held at his new Selangor party office in Bandar Utama on Monday.

The outspoken politician, who stepped down as Gerakan president after 26 years, also took Mahathir to task for his lack of tact.

"(His) criticisms may be right but the attitude and the way the criticisms were presented did not help BN or Umno. If Mahathir loved Umno and BN, he should not have behaved the way he behaved."

Clad in a sky blue shirt and khaki pants, Lim appeared happy seeing the Malaysiakini team but also expressed concern that his statements might be "twisted".

lim keng yaik interview 280408 08 With the scent of Salem cigarettes trailing him as he settled on the sofa, he was in good spirits when quizzed about the elections and called the new political landscape a "breath of fresh air".

"Of course (I am happy with the results). I don't call it a tsunami. Tsunami concocts a negative perspective, it's destructive. I call it a breath of fresh air that is blown into the Malaysian political arena," he said.

Lim noted that his joy comes from the fact that the multiracial politics being called for by the people is Gerakan's ideology that has been marginalised by BN in the past.

Umno's arrogance to blame

However, his tone changed when speaking about Gerakan's future and its relevance after being essentially wiped out in Penang - a state held by the party since 1969 - in the March elections.

Stressing that the party will not desert BN, Lim suggested several ways to return the ruling

coalition to glory beginning with changing the way Umno deals with component parties.

"The first step is to convince Umno that complacency, arrogance, abuse of power must be stopped.

umno selangor shah alam nep protest 190308 02"Change the way how Umno should face other component parties as well as give the impression to the multiracial rakyat that we are all really sitting down on the table planning for Malaysians and not just for any particular race," he said.

The former energy, water and telecommunications minister also proposed all 14 component parties to merge and turn BN into a multiracial party.

But should that fail, he suggested that 13 parties merge to posture Umno instead.

"If Umno cannot accept turning BN into a multiracial party [...] then the other BN partners could think of building up a big multiracial set up to be in partnership with a Malay-based set up.

"Rather than 14 little parties saying their little bit, (the 13) can be one big party and be the partner of Umno which will have a better effect on lowering the posturing of Umno itself."

The former Gerakan president admitted that he failed to change the political scene during his tenure with regards to BN adopting a multiracial approach.

However, he stressed that his party did no wrong.

Despite repeating several times that he does not want to play the 'blame game', Lim however alluded that Gerakan's loss was caused by Umno's arrogance.

"In the Malay-dominated seats, Umno delivered but Umno did not deliver the Malays in the urban areas. Mixed seats in the last 15 years are the ones which suffered the most.

umno 2007 pemuda keris 061107 group"The non-Malays saw Umno's arrogance, the 'ketuanan Melayu' (Malay supremacy), waving of the keris, the way they expressed their feelings in the Umno general assembly.

"Of course, we did not deliver the votes. Of course, we failed. But who did the undoing?" he asked.

Solve the crisis soon

As for the current in-fighting in Umno, Lim warned that if the party remains divided for another two years, it will have a negative effect in the next general election.

"BN with respects to Umno is still scrambling for direction and leadership. You can't go on. If this goes on for two years, it will have negative effects on the following elections.

"People have a memory. If you want to solve it, solve it soon. And it can only be solved by Umno leaders. They should know what's best for the party," he said.

lim keng yaik interview 280408 05With his trademark wit, Lim also predicted that the

opposition alliance Pakatan Rakyat, which now controls five states and considers itself the government-in-waiting, will face the same problems encountered by BN in the past 50 years.

"They will face the same problems that we have faced. They will have to solve the problems with PAS just like how we have to solve the problems with Umno.

"They will have to solve the Indian minority problems and everything else equitably," he added.

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