

Q&A: Election results a 'breath of fresh air'
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The Pakatan Rakyat opposition may have won big but Gerakan advisor Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the March 8 election results was a "breath of fresh air".
MCPX

In an exclusive interview with Malaysiakini at his new Gerakan Selangor office on Monday, the veteran politician shared his views on the new political climate, the possibility of mergers in BN and Gerakan's future.

Are you happy with the election results?

Of course. As a Barisan member, I am happy in a sense that Gerakan which promotes that (multiracial politics) ideology was marginalised. Because of the role that we play in BN, we have to deal with racial parties who always think in terms of racial lines.

lim keng yaik interview 280408 09So we were called a Chinese-based party and given areas for political movement where we work amongst Chinese-dominated constituencies. Then the failure to recruit Malay intellectual members who can sometimes be critical of the government which we would have welcomed into the party.

I don't call it a tsunami. Tsunami concocts a negative perspective, its destructive. I call it a breath of fresh air that is blown into the Malaysian political arena and that is multiracial where the rakyat will vote across racial lines.

Can you elaborate on your statement that Gerakan will consider leaving BN?

No lah. I mean we have discussed this new political breath of fresh air where people want multiracial (politics) which is good for the country. It will help build up the identity of Bangsa Malaysia.

There are obviously various options available and I've always said we are not deserters. We don't go into the blame game although we have strong feelings on what we thought were the causes of the election results.

First we have to work within the Barisan. The first step is to convince Umno that complacency, arrogance, abuse of power must be stopped. And to 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.

Talk to them through closer dialogues and be brave to come out and raise issues to the public. If anybody in Umno falls out of line, tell them to make a stand and discipline their members (laughs). Things like the late Zakaria (Mat Deros), close one eye (Mohd) Said (Yusof) and the 'bocor' remarks bring shame (to the party). You must take action against them.

Secondly, tell Umno that people want multiracial political parties like Rafidah (Aziz) saying we're going multiracial. Turn BN into a multiracial party. You've got to work on it lah.

Then the third step, there must be a time limit for the way we're going on to go on. If that is what the rakyat wants. I'm telling the Chinese not to push their luck. Using words like 'we want equity' or 'fair and equitable treatment' but non-Malays are not equal.

polling day 080308 voter ballot box 01In the constitution there are special rights for the Malays, Islam as the official religion and the institution of the Sultan. These are not debatable or removable. To do that, you're only giving chance for those who just love to bring up racial and religious issues.

With this breath of fresh air, don't push your luck. There are certain things you must realise. There will be some who wants to do away with the NEP which is perceived as a Malay policy not a national policy. If the non-Umno parties push Umno to a corner or if DAP pushes PAS too hard on the Islamic state, this breath of fresh air of multiracialism will push these two (Umno and PAS) to join together and we'll be going back to the dark old days of racial and religious bigotry.

After 36 years, I'm exalted by this new development but it is easy to go awry by (adopting the) wrong behaviour. If Umno cannot accept turning BN into a multiracial party and wants to maintain their Malay-based politics, the protection of their Islamic religion and the institution of the royalty by their own ways of doing things, 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.

That is another development. Rather than 14 little parties saying their little bit, they can be one big party and be the partner of Umno which will have a better effect on lowering the posturing of Umno itself.

Fourthly, if all this doesn't happen within a space of time, Gerakan will have to look for other avenues. I'm not saying we'll join PKR, that's not necessary. We may even think about setting up a third force. It will be a long term struggle but we'll have our way to do it. So we'll see lah, where we're going.

Can you elaborate on the merger of component parties?

I'm sure the parties within BN would have noticed that the people want multiracial parties. Fairness must be seen to be done. Component parties must not be seen as beggars begging (for seats) - sometimes (they) get a few, sometimes not. If they don't get (any), the reasons must be stated and debate must be openly seen by the multiracial rakyat so they can make a judgment on that.

lim keng yaik interview 280408 08Pakatan shows more transparency in this. BN failed miserably giving the impression that all is dominated by Umno. Perceived rightly or wrongly, I'm not making the conclusion but this perception all turned into negative votes.

With this, I think there could be fear and rethinking by the BN component parties. Yes this political tsunami has happened in Peninsular, is it coming to Sabah and Sarawak? There are people perceiving that Chinese and Indians feel like second class citizens but how would East Malaysians feel if they perceive themselves as second class bumiputera? Be careful, these are the things that we need to look into lah before it turns into another tsunami and it hits Sabah and Sarawak and that's it.

Has Gerakan not been able to convince Umno in the past 30 years?

Obviously not. But if you say Keng Yaik in his 22 years in being a cabinet minister has not raised problems like that, then I will be the first to tell you, "How do you know that I did not do it?" (Laughs). But I admit it.

One of the parting shots I made (before stepping down as party president), my only regret over the last 30 years in politics is (my) inability to turn the political scene and this was (said) before the March 8 elections. But the people are doing it now. Thank you and I think Gerakan should be part of it. What Pak Lah has pushed for is too little too late (laughs). But nonetheless, these are good developments.

new economic policy nepThe displeasure with the implementation of the NEP (New Economic Policy) coming up to 1990 made us perform poorly in that elections. Immediately after that, we had Wawasan 2020 which was accepted by all races and classes of society. That's why BN's election results were so good in 1995. The first thing I did in cabinet was to ask (Dr) Mahathir (Mohamad) to institutionalise Wawasan 2020.

As usual, something comes out of the PM and cabinet but it stays with the PM and it stays with the cabinet and nothing comes out. That is one of the weakness of BN. We cannot use this excuse anymore to say our policies are good but something somewhere went wrong with the execution of it. You cannot use that excuse, you are the government. You have to monitor and make sure the civil servants implement what has been decided. If not, sack the whole lot of them.

Since you admit that Gerakan has failed to reform BN and Umno for so many years, how is Gerakan going to do it differently now?

At first it could be Gerakan who wants it. Now Gerakan can say, "It is not us who wants it, it is the people who wants it." Anything wrong, we should stand up and tell Umno if we feel that Umno has become complacent, arrogant and too much abuse of power and corruption. I think Gerakan has done no wrong. We managed Penang in the most transparent way possible. Not a hint of a scandal or abuse of power by (Penang Chief Minister) Koh Tsu Koon and yet we lost.

Why? What were the reasons for Gerakan's dismal election performance?

Because of other things (laughs). I don't want to go into the blame game. A lot of other people are saying the same thing. Umno must discipline their people and not show arrogance. As the Umno elections are coming along they are talking about money politics.

umno agm 2006 101106 crowdMahathir in his favourite way showed his disdain for that kind of money politics by saying, "Stop asking for 'proyek-proyek' (projects)" (laughs). He calls projects as 'proyek-proyek'. As a doctor to another doctor, I can understand his psychology. But his hands and feet are tied because his party was developing into a party where people join in to get 'proyek-proyek'. So this must change. Can they change? You tell me.

Pakatan Rakyat seems to be saying all the right things and we're still fumbling with how to move forward. Whether the PM should stay or not? Who's going to take over? How long is the transitional period? Of course the opposition is embarking on populist politics but at least put our own house in order lah.

This is Umno politics but as an observer I can say they better solve it as soon as possible

because we are like a rudderless ship floating in the vast ocean. We'll be lost or worst still, we'll be sunk.

Are you saying Umno is the main reason for the losses suffered by Gerakan and MCA in the elections?

We also take responsibility for not being able to change things where we felt was wrong. For being unable to build an understanding and dialogue where the outside people can see it is equal dialogue that there is 'respect for each other's' representation. Stop talking about racial politics and any utterances should be for the good of all Malaysians.

But Umno has accused Gerakan and MCA of not being able to deliver the seats causing defeat in Penang and Perak. What is your opinion on that?

Do you think they delivered the seats? I've argued against that. 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. It's not going to be the blame game. It is also our fault because we did not convince the non-Malays to vote for us.

umno 2007 pemuda keris 061107 arrogantThe 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. Unless we say, 'you shut up or we'll leave' but is in the spirit of the BN, we shut up and we didn't leave (laughs).

So what are you talking about? Of course we did not deliver the votes. Of course we failed. But who did the undoing? Can you solve the problem? How do you feel when you are a mother who is divorced from a husband whose convenience became a Muslim and took the children to become Muslim and the courts say we have no jurisdiction in the civil courts, go to the Syariah courts where she has no standing?

You and parliament should have worked on it and changed it. Give people the impression that they are equal in the eyes of the law. Student who gets 8 straight As gets called for an interview but they are not going to get (the scholarship). All these things happen.

Today, bureaucratic racialism is the epitome of biasness but they are not doing anything about it. Sometimes they let the civil servants do the job but not all civil servants are good especially the ones that are not being trained.

Do you know the courses given to them in Intan (National Institute Of Public Administration)? You want me to pour (out) my heart? You've got to manage the civil service. That's why I marvel at Hu Jintao (China's president) and the Chinese communist system. What Hu says is repeated by the village chief, whether he understands it or not, he'll repeat it right down the line.

But what the PM says in cabinet, the fellow down on the ground has no blooming idea about what is going on and does the opposite. How are we going to deliver with that kind of behaviour, who do we blame? Who are fighting for the projects? Who gets most of the projects? Who showed arrogance?

Do I bring my 'guan dao' (a traditional Chinese weapon) in my assembly and say it is our symbol of unity based on my experience as Wushu Malaysia president? (Laughs) Don't lah. It is only displayed insensitively. Yes you might be promoting your heritage but the people don't understand and it brings fear to others.

What do you think are the differences between Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his predecessor Dr Mahathir Mohamad as prime minister since you have worked with them for so long?

mahathir abdullah ahmad badawi pak lah raising tensions I don't know but if I know Mahathir, there is a saying in those days, that you don't step on his tail or he will become very vicious. Whatever tail lah - political tail, family tail (laughs). So I don't know what Pak Lah's tail is but Mahathir has every right to talk but he should not talk like that. I have my views of Pak Lah and the fourth floor boys. I can give my analysis without being critical.

Do you think Mahathir's statement affected Umno or BN's performance in the elections?

Mahathir has in a way affected them. He may be a single ordinary citizen but he is a super citizen because he has been PM for 22 years. So he must know when (to talk) as I have criticised, I am not going to do it Mahathir-style. (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.

Now, 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 that what he says is wrong. If he keeps on saying things and you don't respond, then whatever he's saying must be right. "Most useless leader", "most corrupted government" - if you don't respond, he must be right. "We need a bigger opposition" ... I tell you the people responded to Mahathir more than they responded to Pak Lah.

So Pak Lah was wrong in not responding to Mahathir's criticisms?

I think so.

How would you judge Abdullah's performance so far?

Comments reserved because he is still Barisan Nasional chairman and PM. We don't criticise each other - the leaders of the component parties - even though we are retired. What will happen if we start arguing and pointing fingers at each other especially on racial or religious lines? What will happen to this country? Are we right to maintain this discipline?

I see even in Pakatan Rakyat, they maintain certain decorum when they debate amongst each other because it is party to party, a coalition of parties. So you better get it right lah (laughs). It is always about the weakness of Pak Lah (and he should) leave the party, but yet he has shown strength for admitting mistakes of the past in the Bar Council dinner with the reforms and the ACA reforms. Is this not strength?

Isn't this too little too late?

Whatever it is, it is still strength and even that maybe the Wawasan 2020 came a little too late for BN in the 1990 elections but helped for the 1995. So I hope the people remember these actions from Pak Lah. If he doesn't stay, then these are forgotten because it is done during his time but if he stays, will Umno be happy with him? All these are considerations. I'm not for nor against.

Next is to set up the IPCMC (Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission) and that would be the complete set of reforms. Also, the next thing he should do is to institute a body to oversee the civil servants and implementation of qualities and how to run

a country without any form of racial biasness. The civil service is 90 percent Malays. What else can you expect? You don't blame them, it's the herd mentality. Rightly or wrongly this has to be reinstated to make it more multiracial.

Can you comment on the Umno infighting now - is it good for BN?

No, it's not good. I mentioned the Pakatan appears to be doing everything right with the right utterances. On the other hand, BN with respects to Umno is still scrambling for direction and leadership. You can't go on. If this goes on for up to 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.

Do you think it was a mistake for Gerakan not to field any non-Chinese in the elections?

Within the BN, we were not. As opposition you can (field candidates of any race) but the BN compartmentalises us into Malay, Chinese, Indian. Within BN (we) cannot, but outside BN (we can) anytime. You see the trouble is whether (the seat) is winnable or not. Of course now on second thoughts, mixed seats that were so-called safe seats became the most unsafe seats.

lim keng yaik interview 280408 05Do you think I should send an Indian member to Kepong? But DAP can send Kulasegaran to Ipoh Barat (laughs). DAP can send (PKR de facto leader) Anwar (Ibrahim) to Seputeh and he'll win hands down. These are the political realities which we have been working on in BN all these years. You can use emotion, the Makkal Sakthi (people's power) can talk and place all the blame on Gerakan by playing up the Indian emotions. We suffer lah, what to do?

A new phenomenon is starting. The Indian demands has increasingly been raised. Let's hope (deputy Penang CM) Prof P Ramasamy, (Subang MP R) Sivarasa and Kumar (V Sivakumar, Perak state speaker and Tronoh state representative) can help them. After this, Kulasegaran wants to be the mayor of Ipoh, best of luck to him. Don't you think they are demanding? But these are the problems.

When you raise the Indian hopes, now the Indians say we must have this and that. No Indian exco member (in Perak), you're asking for quotas ah? You're not allowed to pick and choose the best? And because of this quota, the Pakatan is going to face all these problems, thank you very much.

Yes we give them a chance to work it out but we can see it a mile coming. They will face the same problems that we have faced in the past years. 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.

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