

'Pakatan manipulating crossover threat'
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Muda Mohd Nor

Umno information chief Muhammad Muhd Taib does not believe there is anything to speculation that Barisan Nasional parliamentarians in Sabah may defect to Pakatan Rakyat. MCPX

abdul ghapur sallehKalabakan MP Abdul Ghapur Salleh, in accusing the federal government on Monday of sidelining the state, had warned that it may prompt crossovers as a consequence.

However Muhammad, who is also rural and regional development minister, was of the view that Abdul Ghapur was only expressing concern and the situation would not lead to defections.

"He was only doing what he thinks is best for his state and I share his concerns. But I think the opposition is exploiting and manipulating this matter to create unrest and guilt among BN members," he told Malaysiakini.

muhammad mohd taib and umnoExpressing confidence in the loyalty of BN members, Muhammad also said the government has never neglected the welfare of Sabah and Sarawak - the two states that delivered the most seats in the general election held on March 8.

Pakatan unexpectedly won 82 parliamentary seats, leaving BN with 140 and without a two-thirds majority for the first time in the country's electoral history.

The strongholds of Perak, Kedah, Penang and Selangor fell to Pakatan candidates, while PAS retained control of Kelantan. Ten of the 11 parliamentary seats in the Kuala Lumpur also went to opposition candidates.

Asked for the factors behind the BN's disastrous performance, Muhammad hinted at internal feuds and nomination of candidates as primary issues.

If not for the rifts, BN would have won an additional 14 parliament seats and 22 state seats in Perak, Kedah and Selangor, he claimed.

In certain areas, BN supporters had deliberately picked opposition candidates in order to send "a clear signal to the government that they were less than happy with it".

polling day 080308 voter ballot box 02"This is an extraordinary outcome as the voters had just wanted to send a simple message only. They were upset... but (I think they) only wanted to see BN win with a smaller margin."

Muhammad suggested that each BN-controlled division had thought of sending the same message but that this had snowballed into an negative outcome.

"It is not that voters don't like BN, but the mood had simply shifted towards the opposition. That is why I stressed that Pakatan won these four states (and retained Kelantan), not because they are popular, but because voters did not agree with the (BN) candidates," he

said.

However, he also said this would be a temporary situation and that the opposition should not be too excited over its electoral gains.

"BN will bounce back because our supporters have come back to support us," he said.

'No infighting in Umno'

Muhammad also denied rumours of on-going infighting in Umno.

nik aziz 01karpal singh"BN is not like (PAS spiritual leader and Kelantan Menteri Besar) Nik Aziz Nik Mat (right) and (DAP national chairperson) Karpal Singh (left) whose (political) principles are irreconcilable," he argued.

The BN, he said, practises democratic dialogue. If agreement is not reached, the discussion is taken further to smoothen out issues.

"...Abdullah and other cabinet ministers... have managed to overcome difficulties and helped those in need (especially) the Malays. And even though the government is helping the Malays, other races understand it," he claimed.

khir toyo smoothAsked to elaborate on his criticism of former Umno president and premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former Selangor Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo (left), Muhammad refused to do so.

"I have talked about this before (so) I don't want to repeat it. We should be thinking about consolidating the party and get back the people's support," he said.

Muhammad had previously ticked off Mahathir over "unfair comments against Abdullah for the party's poor performance" in the polls.

Mahathir has repeatedly accused Abdullah as being a weak leader and even professed regret for having handpicked Abdullah as his successor in 2003.