

It's time BN adopts single party system

The Star - 12/3/2008

Coalition must revamp, forum told

PETALING JAYA: The way forward for Barisan Nasional is for it to revamp itself just as the Opposition had by coming up with a new power-sharing concept that will appeal to voters of all races, a post-election forum was told yesterday.

Speakers at *The Star-ACMS Public Forum: The 2008 General Election: Review and Reflection* agreed that the time had come for the federal ruling coalition to become a single political party.

"PKR has shown that as one single party it could have Chinese, Indian and Malay leaders," Social Strategic Foundation executive director Datuk Dr Dennison Jayasooria said.

Dr Jayasooria said the Barisan's present set-up had almost crippled the component parties because they could not voice matters in the open.

He told the forum that besides the reform of the Barisan concept, the individual component parties also had to carry out their own reconstruction.

"The MIC reform needs to be in the context of a Barisan reform and Barisan needs to move as one party at all levels.

"It cannot be just Umno moving with PAS because you will see a major swing that will strengthen the Opposition.

"Umno would have to be far more magnanimous, think outside the box. It has to move the agenda of politics and Malay confidence to a level it has not known before," he said.

Dr Jayasooria also noted that the MIC and MCA needed to look at its social, economic, educational institutions that sometimes distracted its political roles.

UKM's Institute of Ethnic Studies founding director Prof Datuk Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin said the problem was that there was no two-party system but one where "one party gobbled up every other party".

He said the Barisan parties "slept with each other but fully-clothed" and thus they had little knowledge of each other while the Opposition was also in the same position.

Johor Baru MP Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said Umno must engage with non-governmental organisations for it to survive.

He said political parties that were race-based should reach out to every level of the society outside their political structure.

"The Barisan must not only work together during the elections," he said.

Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen said the MCA would conduct an honest appraisal of its strengths and weaknesses.

She also said Barisan, especially Umno, needed to appraise the affirmative action for the Malays as while the New Economic Policy was a stumbling block for the Chinese, even the Malays voted against Barisan.

"Could it be because our model is wrong? Maybe the NEP is not all they want but also governance, accountability and transparency. Barisan should re-look at the model. Is it time the affirmative action is set within a time-frame?" she asked.

The speakers also agreed that Malaysians did not vote along communal lines during the general election.

Dr Jayasooria said the "wind of change" could not have happened with just the Chinese and Indian vote swing but also the sizeable number of Malays who showed their displeasure against Barisan.

"This is not like the ethnic issues in the 1969 election. It cuts across race, is very much about class issue and the political landscape of the future has changed," he said.

He said Malaysians clearly wanted a just and fair government, accountability and good governance, which were the themes of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration.

On the Indians voting against the MIC, Dr Jayasooria said they had decided that it was more important for them to have a stronger voice in Parliament than a stronger role in Government.

"This is bad for the Barisan and the MIC but overall good for the Indian community and democracy," he said.

Even the Opposition were surprised by their win, said DAP's Teresa Kok who won the Seputeh parliamentary and Kinrara state seats.

She said Malaysians voted for them because of dissatisfactions that cut across race, and the Malays voted for DAP because of unhappiness with inflation and rising prices of goods.

Among the non-Malays, they were unhappy with racial and religious issues, she said.