

Nazri says no to zero Chinese representation in government
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 6 — A senior Umno minister has declared that he would fight tooth and nail to ensure Chinese representation in a Barisan Nasional (BN) government even if the MCA or Gerakan fails to secure a single parliamentary seat in the coming polls.

Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz told The Malaysian Insider that BN would not “punish” the Chinese voters by simply yanking their representatives from Cabinet posts if they refused to vote for the two Chinese-centric component parties.

Nazri assured the Chinese of representation in a BN government ‘even though I am a nobody in Umno... not even a vice-president’. — File pic

While admitting that the matter would not be his to decide, the minister in the Prime Minister’s Department gave his word that he would champion this cause to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak should such a situation arise when the coalition retains the government.

“I want to tell the Chinese voters that BN is a multi-racial government and regardless of the outcome of the elections, we will always have a Chinese representative in Cabinet. I want to say this with certainty even though I am a nobody in Umno... not even a vice-president.

“But if it should come to that, I will do my very best to persuade the PM that we should not have a single communal government. The system allows us to appoint senators and we need to have representatives of the non-Malay community,” he said.

Nazri recalled that such a promise was made by the country’s longest-serving prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his tenure in government.

“I remember back when Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was PM... he told Cabinet that even if we come to a stage where MCA or Gerakan loses in all parliamentary seats, we cannot form a Malay government.

“We cannot be a single communal government as it simple goes against the spirit and policy of BN. We cannot punish and penalise a section of the community just because they do not support BN,” he said.

Nazri was recalling a pledge made by MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek several months ago when the former Cabinet minister said he would pull his party from the government if it performs worse than it did in Election 2008.

Dr Chua first mooted the idea when he urged the Sarawak United People’s Party (SUPP) not to join the Sarawak Cabinet after it only won six of the 19 seats it contested in the April 16 state polls.

He later said the MCA would do the same, using the 2008 results as its benchmark. Should MCA fail to win at least 15 parliamentary and 31 state seats, pledged Dr Chua, the party will not accept any Cabinet posts in the next government.

Nazri likened this to a threat to the Chinese community, lamenting that many of his ethnic Chinese friends had approached him with complaints.

"You must ask the Chinese community, not me, if they feel threatened. But most of my Chinese friends feel threatened and we do not want the Chinese voters to feel this way. In whatever circumstances, we will not take revenge on any segment of the community," he said.

Nazri said it was unlikely that Najib would allow zero representation from the Chinese community in government, pointing to how the prime minister himself had appointed Gerakan president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and MIC president Datuk G. Palanivel as senators in his Cabinet.

"So I am actually saying this based on Najib's actions alone. Do not forget that even if we lose the seats, perhaps in terms of popular votes, 51 per cent of Chinese votes went to the opposition... so what about the remaining 49 per cent? We cannot punish them," he said.

BN component parties are now busy compiling their candidate lists as Najib had recently signalled the coalition to prepare for the next general election before its mandate expires in 2013.

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