

Five states 'in danger' for BN in GE, says Khir Toyo
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 30 — Former Umno supreme council member Dr Mohd Khir Toyo has singled out five states which will be difficult for Barisan Nasional (BN) to win or retain in the next election, saying that the ruling coalition's old formula of attracting voters no longer worked.

The states named by Khir were Penang, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Perak as well as the Federal Territories, where the influx of newly-registered voters has resulted in an almost equal demography between Malay and non-Malay voters.

"These are tricky... Penang, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Wilayah if you look at these voters, the non-Malay voters are almost equivalent to Malay voters in terms of numbers, they are almost balanced.

"These states are in danger," Khir (picture) told The Malaysian Insider in an exclusive interview last week.

The former Selangor menteri besar said that while most Malays still supported Umno, most of the Malay party's vote bank came from rural areas, while voters in more "urban" states and areas would end up voting for Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

"It is not because the opposition is good. No, they have a lot of weaknesses. Have they fulfilled all their election promises? No.

"But the urban areas are very dangerous in these states. The mistake is to make Umno too dominant... there is a danger of losing," he said.

Making non-Malay voters feel powerless while making Umno do all of BN's work will result in a steady decline of support towards the ruling coalition, Khir added.

"I learn from my mistakes. To make Umno too dominant in BN is not good. Overall the federal leadership must have other strategies.

"You look at PAS, they are more dangerous than Umno but non-Malays support them... why? Because they are not dominant in Pakatan," Khir stressed.

The Umno leader lamented how it was difficult to gauge how much support BN had among other races, and blamed component parties MCA, MIC and Gerakan for not being aggressive enough.

Another issue, he said, was a disconnect between non-Malay voters and Umno in the form of language barriers.

"MCA, MIC are supposed to go to the ground, talk to these people. Umno has done it for the Malays.

"When Umno tries to go to talk to non-Malays, sometimes there is a language barrier, for example, in the city they talk English, some Umno leaders cannot understand," he added.

The solution, said Khir, was for BN to "empower" MCA, MIC, and Gerakan party leaders by allowing them to announce allocations and projects for their own communities instead of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak doing so.

The Umno leader said that non-Malays had lost "respect" for BN component party leaders as they were seen as not being able to do anything to help their own communities.

"That is why now we have to give more power to MCA, MIC. Make sure their party presidents announce school allocations to their own communities. If we hope for the PM and deputy prime minister to do this, Umno will be seen as too dominant, and the Chinese will lose respect towards their own leaders.

"That's the problem now, I always say that now we need to enhance opportunities to other party leaders to make their own decisions and we give them allocations," he stressed.

Khir praised Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for empowering component party leaders during his tenure as PM, and that that was why past leaders like Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik were respected.

"That's why Samy Vellu was like the king for his race. Because he announced the allocations, not Dr Mahathir. Last time component leaders were very strong and respected because they went down to the ground and gave things... Current minister have no 'oomph' factor. Look at (Datuk Seri) Liow (Tiong Lai) and (Datuk Seri) Kong Cho Ha."

BN faced its worst electoral result in the 2008 general election when it lost five states to Pakatan Rakyat as well as its customary two-thirds majority in Parliament.

But Najib has indicated that he will soon call a general election, saying that confidence in BN has surged of late.

Umno-controlled Berita Harian reported the prime minister as saying in Port Dickson on March 24 that "rasa-rasa bunyi (PRU) dah dekat (feel the sounds (of elections) are near)."

The Umno president said last week he will dissolve Parliament when public confidence towards his administration is at its highest level.

Observers say Najib took over in April 2009 ostensibly to improve on the ruling coalition's performance, with only a return to a two-thirds majority able to guarantee he remains in power.

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