

Pak Lah says race top issue for elections
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, March 12 — Tun Abdullah Badawi believes that race will be the main issue in elections that must be called by April next year.

The former prime minister told international business wire Bloomberg in an interview published today that “the major issue will be the subject of race, two is the economy.”

“We are always concerned about race. Because there is a tendency for certain parties to make use of these issues, as a way of getting support for them and creating problems for us,” the former Barisan Nasional (BN) chief said in a video interview recorded on March 6.

The Kepala Batas MP, who led the coalition to its worst ever electoral result in 2008, said that the position of Malays and the rights of non-Malays as well as issues like race cannot be ignored.

“If we are going to win, to do well in elections, then addressing them fairly and equitably is very, very important,” said Abdullah, who was prime minister for five-and-a-half years before being forced to hand over the reins to Datuk Seri Najib Razak in April 2009.

His statement comes despite most analysts and a recent survey of voters putting the economy as the main concern for the electorate who experienced an inflation rate of over three per cent for nearly all of 2011, with June’s 3.5 per cent jump in consumer price index the highest in 27 months.

Abdullah’s BN lost its customary two-thirds majority of Parliament and a record five state governments in March 2008, a performance which saw the dominant Umno quickly ushering him out of power.

However, he told Bloomberg “the lesson we can learn is, and some people may not agree, but the fact we didn’t have two-thirds did not mean that we became weak.”

“We still have 60 per cent which is big for many countries in Europe. But we have always been talking about two-thirds as what we want. But we might be able to regain it,” he said.

Najib took over from Abdullah ostensibly to improve BN’s performance in the next general election.

Observers believe he needs to bring about an improvement on the 142 federal seats won as well as regain some of the states lost to be assured of remaining in power.

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