

Kayveas: Malaysians ready for non-racial politics but not BN
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 — Malaysians are ready to accept a single, multiracial Barisan Nasional (BN) party but politicians in the ruling federal coalition may reject the idea for fear of losing political power, says People's Progressive Party (PPP) president Datuk M. Kayveas.

The idea for a consolidated BN has been floated since Election 2008 but the only concession has been coalition chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak getting approval for direct membership to the 13-member ruling pact, similar to the membership class for its predecessor the Alliance.

"But it is very difficult to function this way. We cannot tell our children to go to school and mix with people of all races when the political parties pushing for this are the ones who, when you go to their AGM, for example, Umno goes for 'Hidup Melayu' (long live the Malays), MCA will be with their Chinese agenda and MIC will be with their temples and Tamil schools.

"The children we tell to mix with everyone and become Malaysians will not find it easy to understand why the adults are practising something else," Kayveas (picture) told The Malaysian Insider in a recent interview.

The PPP president revealed that he had tried to promote the idea of a single, multiracial BN after Election 2008 but it was shot down after leaders declared that they were not ready to change the present system.

When asked why, Kayveas suggested that leaders were likely afraid of the possibility that a multiracial BN party would use a merits-based system to elect its leadership instead of racial quotas.

This, he pointed out, may result in a minority community taking up more leadership posts in the party instead of the majority.

"The committee, of say 45, in the BN hierarchy could be a mixed, open group. It may go on merits, on those who are elected. And then [there is] the fear of certain communities, even though being large, their representation becomes less.

"That could be one of the biggest fears among them, [from] what I see," he said.

But despite the negative response from BN component party leaders, Kayveas insisted that a single, multiracial BN is the way ahead for the ruling pact, pointing out that it would eliminate politicking, cliques, cronyism and even nepotism.

"These would totally be avoided... and people with [vested] interest — because they have invested so long in politics — will be losing because suddenly, they are not there... they see the hierarchy moving out. Maybe this is one of the fears," he said.

The former senator and deputy minister, however, acknowledged that BN's 2010 decision to create "direct memberships" was a positive step towards the concept of totally shedding racial boundaries.

He said that if the direct membership accumulates to a significant number, this would be a clear enough indication to the BN leadership that the time was ripe to dissolve race-based parties in the pact.

Just under two years after he took over as prime minister, Najib announced in November 2010 that BN would accept direct members into its ranks, saying this would provide a platform for those who were not interested in being members of any of the coalition's 13 component parties to be a part of the BN family.

Kayveas insisted that Malaysians were ready for more such moves, expressing confidence that voters would choose a candidate based on merit instead of racial considerations.

He said it was an often-used excuse from leaders in claiming that they needed the backing of a race-based party in order to secure their seats.

"All this while, I have been running a multiracial party and I will face challenges from race-based parties. I see the fear in that they would always use this race card — I am championing my race, if I don't champion my race, I will not get voted in.

"But you don't get voted because your party is race-based. If you dismantle race-based politics, you would still get voted if you are a good leader," he said.

Kayveas added that it was also a myth that Malaysia's various ethnic communities were not supportive or helpful of one another.

"So the question is always — are we ready to start? But we will never be ready if we keep asking this question... when the idea is there, never keep it waiting or you will never be ready," he said.

"So it is not the question of being ready. It is an excuse to use the word 'not ready' by not wanting to be ready."

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