

GE13 to show if Malays will ditch Umno, says Zaid
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By Jahabar Sadiq

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 26 — The next general elections will reveal if the majority Malays are ready to abandon “the path chosen for them by Umno for the last 55 years” and seek other answers to the problems they face, says political maverick Datuk Zaid Ibrahim.

The former Umno minister said he sensed the Malay nationalist party was fearful of the community’s changing mindset, which has prompted Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to castigate “so-called ungrateful Malays” recently. His comments came as a Universiti Malaya survey showed that the Umno-led Barisan Nasional (BN) will continue to govern the country despite rising support for Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

“This election, more than the previous ones, will show if the Malays and the Bumiputeras are ready to abandon the path chosen for them by Umno for the last 55 years,” Zaid said in an email to The Malaysian Insider.

“This election will show if they are now ready to trust themselves. For so long, they have implicit and absolute trust in their leaders. The question is will they continue to do that or will they seek alternative answers to the many problems they face in their daily lives,” he added.

Umno was founded in 1946 to oppose the Malayan Union established by the British colonialists to unite all states in the Malay peninsula, which were mainly agrarian then. Umno’s second president, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, together with allies MCA and MIC negotiated Malaya’s independence in 1957 and later formed Malaysia with Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore. Singapore was then expelled in 1965.

The original Alliance comprising Umno, MCA and MIC was expanded to become BN in the 1974 election, after the 1969 race riots that cost Tunku Abdul Rahman his job. Umno was later deregistered in 1988 after a leadership split led to the discovery of illegal branches. The current Umno is officially registered as Umno Baru. A splinter group in 1951 later became known as PAS, which advocates an Islamist state.

BN suffered historic losses in Election 2008, losing five states and its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority. The defeat prompted Tun Abdullah Badawi to resign a year later as prime minister in favour of Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who has been tirelessly campaigning to win back support for the ruling BN. Najib has promised reforms but has yet to indicate when he will call for the election, which must be held by middle of 2013.

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir has said November would be ideal for a snap election and, while calling the Malays “ungrateful” and “lacking intelligence”, warned that the greed of a few power-hungry Malays in the opposition would see the country’s dominant race lose its political power.

In his lengthy tirade against the Malays in the Mingguan Malaysia weekly on Sunday, Dr Mahathir expressed sadness that the Malays were now purportedly split into three factions and said that this has resulted in them “begging” for support from the other races.

"Who brought on this disaster? No other than the Malays themselves, greedy Malays, Malays lacking in intelligence, Malays easily influenced by lust, easily dominated by hatred when agitated," he continued in typical no-holds-barred fashion.

Zaid, who built the country's largest law partnership before entering politics, had denounced Dr Mahathir's statement, saying he would rather be "ungrateful Malay" than be considered a "stupid one".

"I sense that Umno is now fearful of the Malay mindset change. That's why their chief ideologue, Dr M, has launched these incessant attacks on the so called ungrateful Malays. These Malays are not ungrateful; they have just discovered that there is life after Umno," he said in his email to The Malaysian Insider.

His observation came as a survey by University of Malaya's Centre for Democracy and Elections (UMCEDEL) found that BN garnered 44 per cent of support among those polled, a drop from last March's results that stood at 49 per cent. There was also a growing number of people who believed that PR could take over Putrajaya, from 21 per cent in March to 30 per cent in the survey "Polling Trends in the Run-up to the 13th General Election" carried out from September 1-16.

The survey results also indicated that PR would likely hold onto Selangor and Kedah but there was a drop in support among Kelantan residents towards the state's PAS-led government.

The face-to-face survey involved 1,536 respondents, from across all three major ethnic groups. Each person was randomly selected to answer a structured survey.

The survey also showed that Najib's popularity fell from 61 per cent in March to 58 per cent this month.

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