

**Sabah BN must overcome voters' unhappiness, state leaders say**  
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**By Ida Lim**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 7 — The Sabah government needs to find out why voters surveyed last month are dissatisfied with it, especially the economy, and work to improve their services, say Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders from the coalition's key votebank.

A Merdeka Center survey released on Friday showed that 57 per cent were dissatisfied with Sabah's economic performance and only 56 per cent of Sabah voters were satisfied with the state government, a six per cent drop from 62 per cent in November 2009. The country's easternmost state has been described as BN's "fixed deposit".

"I think the only way to solve all the problem, BN Sabah should work smart and consider what (are the) people's problem, what people need," said senior Umno backbencher Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin, adding that the BN government "should do more" to develop the state.

But Bung Mokhtar said the state government cannot deliver everything, pointing out that it was the same for other states and even United States President Barack Obama has been criticised by his own people.

"What I can see state government is hardworking, of course not everything they can deliver," the Kinabatangan MP told The Malaysian Insider.

"The people, they know how to see you, they know how to judge you. We cannot hide anything," he said, when commenting on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman's ratings.

The survey showed Najib's ratings remaining stable at 75 per cent, but Musa's fell from 60 per cent in November 2009 to 45 per cent in September, suggesting the ruling BN will be faced with some hurdles in its stronghold ahead of elections soon.

Merdeka Center said Musa's decline in popularity was most marked among Muslim-Bumiputera voters who are the backbone of the state's Umno support, with a drop from 72 per cent in November 2009 to 51 per cent last month.

Musa is also the Sabah Umno chief and Sabah BN chief.

When asked if there should be a change in the chief minister, Bung Mokhtar said: "No comment. It's up to PM's prerogative."

When asked about the survey results, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) president Datuk V.K. Liew said: "That's why I want to know why they are not satisfied, is it because not able to perform..., is it because of economy or corruption?"

He added that allegations of corruption should not be made without the furnishing of evidence, saying that sometimes people make such claims due to "jealousy".

Liew pointed to the huge amount in Sabah's coffers as proof that the state is doing well when commenting on Sabahans being unsatisfied with the state's economic performance.

"It's a joke because state government's coffer has RM4 billion," adding that it was an unfair statement to make, saying that Sabah has more in its coffers compared to Penang and Selangor.

He said the state government can still improve their services and change voters' opinion before the 13th general elections.

"Since we have about six months before term of government expires, so public perception can change gradually over the performance of government."

Sabah Umno deputy head Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak said opinion polls and surveys have advantages, but if not properly carried out, it can be flawed and disrespectful to certain parties.

Without saying as much that a recent Merdeka Centre survey was wrong, Salleh said that if a survey was driven by an agenda, there was little to

prevent those behind it from manipulating the results to fit the plan.

"Even the wording of the questions (in the survey) can whip up a certain response and provoke the person from saying things he never intended to say in the first place," he said in a statement carried by state news agency Bernama.

Salleh said he personally did not think that Musa's popularity had shrunk nor his decisions on how the state is developed had negative implications on the people.

Sabah and Sarawak are crucial frontline states which both BN and the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) will have to win in order to take Putrajaya in the next general election.

In Election 2008, BN lost the popular vote in Peninsular Malaysia and analysts say the sentiment remains largely the same in the months leading up to the next elections.

In the first part of its survey released last week, the Merdeka Center also found that only 54 per cent of voters polled last September felt the state was heading in the right direction compared to 66 per cent in November 2009.

The top five reasons for the drop include the issue of illegal immigrants, dissatisfaction with political leadership, the high cost of living, and "the perception" that Sabah was still "lagging" behind in economic development and infrastructure.

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