

Warlords call the shots in Umno
Malaysian Insider
May 3, 2013

ALOR STAR, May 3 — Umno division chiefs, often referred to as “warlords”, play a big role in whether the party wins or loses in elections, and it is no different in this general election, according to a report in The Straits Times today.

The Singapore daily reported that these warlords are a kind of pseudo-godfather — doing everything from dishing out aid to villagers whose roofs were blown away by a storm, to giving money to a poor family to buy school textbooks.

The chiefs get financial allocations from the party and government. They also lobby the central government to build clinics and schools in their districts.

In return, they deliver votes for Umno and its Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition come elections, the newspaper said.

It reported the example of one such “warlord” —Perlis Umno division chief Radzi Sheikh Ahmad — whose supporters were unhappy when they heard that he would be dropped as a candidate three weeks ago — dozens went to Kuala Lumpur to demonstrate at the party’s headquarters.

Only after they were assured of an acceptable replacement, and not someone from outside Perlis as rumoured, did they leave.

These warlords have to be kept happy, party leaders and analysts told The Straits Times, as they can otherwise sabotage candidates who are parachuted in.

It reported that in this election, the wrath of the warlords was on full display when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak shoehorned his own “winnable” candidates into many constituencies as he prepared for the closest election in Malaysia in decades.

“This is the grassroots strength of Umno with a lot of loyal members at the bottom doing the work. The problem starts only when a young leader tries to push his way up too quickly,” it quoted Ramli Yunus, a secretary at a Kedah division, as saying.

The paper said for some Kedah warlords, it is a sore point, for example, that Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir, son of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is leapfrogging many of them as Najib’s choice for menteri besar of Kedah. Mukhriz is a deputy federal minister but not a Kedah division chief.

The chiefs include everyone from urbane PM Najib, who heads a division in Pahang, to mild-mannered Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, the warlord of a Kelantan hamlet.

These chiefs are often seen at weddings and funerals.

During the general election and by-elections, disaffected warlords have at times sabotaged their own party by shutting down operations centres — makeshift huts that locals visit to check on voting eligibility, the Singapore daily reported.

Other warlords are known to have told supporters to vote for the other side.

To reduce internal mischief, troublesome local leaders are often “given goodies”, political analyst Yahaya Ismail, who has written several books on Umno leaders, told the daily.

Love them or hate them, the warlords have power levers from the lowly village all the way into the heart of Malaysia’s government, it said.

Hakcipta © 2013 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/warlords-call-the-shots-in-umno/>