

Najib defends Utusan, dismisses urban-rural divide view
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 7 — Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak has dismissed polls data showing an urban-rural divide and defended Utusan Malaysia against accusations of racism after the Umno-owned paper blamed the Chinese for the coalition's poor showing in the May 5 polls.

The prime minister said the coalition's own study contradicted claims that BN is favoured only in rural Malaysia, as its own survey showed increased Malay support in the urban areas.

He also appeared to blame Utusan Malaysia's attacks against the Chinese community on the DAP, claiming the predominantly Chinese opposition party had misled the Chinese into greater racial polarisation by making them think that voting the party would lead to a change of government.

"You blamed Utusan but you don't ask about the Chinese papers," Najib told a press conference when asked how is he to achieve national reconciliation if Utusan kept harping on race issues.

He did not say what was objectionable in the Chinese-language newspapers.

"What we realise is the opposition party, and particularly the DAP, had painted this picture that if they voted for them they could change the government. And those who voted for the government really believed that they could change the government.

"Even though a huge percentage of them supported the opposition, the government did not change, the BN government is still here. Because the reality is you cannot change the government without the support of the Bumiputeras," he said.

Analysts have said data from voting trends showed the outcome of Election 2013 was not simply the result of a "Chinese tsunami" as Datuk Seri Najib Razak has claimed but a major swing in the urban and middle-class electorate that saw Malaysia's urban-rural rift widen.

But Utusan Malaysia, a newspaper that has represented the right-wing forces aligned largely with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, decided today to publish a number of stories blaming the Chinese for dividing Malaysia.

Umno's Utusan Malaysia front-paged today the question "Apa lagi Cina mahu (What else do the Chinese want?) in what appeared to be an attempt to shape the results of Election 2013 as a Chinese-vs-Malay vote.

Utusan Malaysia's front page suggests that Najib will have his hands full dealing with the powerful right-wing faction in Umno from which he received strong backing in the elections.

An analysis of how the vote went shows a country with rural-urban and class divisions that will make any reconciliation and necessary reforms even more difficult to implement.

The need to continue dismantling Bumiputera policies and to introduce the controversial

bitter pill of a Goods and Services Tax (GST) — steps necessary to make Malaysia more competitive and lift it out of a middle-income trap — appears to be even more daunting because of the conflicting tug-of-war between the two Malaysias that have emerged.

Yesterday, a former editor of the Umno-owned New Straits Times said BN's weaker showing in Election 2013 points to a strong wave of rejection from all Malaysians and not just from the minority Chinese.

Datuk A. Kadir Jasin observed that the 13-party coalition not only drew fewer seats in the 222-member Dewan Rakyat and 12 state assemblies in Sunday's general election compared to 2008, but also lost the popular vote for the first time since polls in 1969.

"Is it not possible that this is not a Chinese tsunami or racial chauvinism but a Malaysian tsunami that is centred on the aspiration and new reality, especially among young voters?" the man who had been group editor-in-chief of the public-listed News Straits Times Press during the Mahathir administration wrote in his blog.

Najib had alluded to a "Chinese tsunami" in an immediate speech just after midnight on Sunday when the Election Commission announced the BN as winners by a simple majority, but the veteran journalist brushed aside the perception as unlikely.

Kadir highlighted that BN took a severe beating this round and bled more seats at both the federal and state levels compared to 2008, leaving it with only 133 federal seats and 274 out of the 505 total state seats despite wresting back Kedah from the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) pact.

Meanwhile, on suggestions that the division was more of class and urban-rural gap, the Umno president stressed that BN has the data to show that Malay support in the urban seats have increased since Election 2008.

"We have facts... in the urban areas... that represent the Malays basically strengthened," he said.

Najib also said DAP's communal politicking was the chief factor behind the coalition's reduced majority and that if the Chinese support remained at the same level as 2008, BN would have won the May 5 polls with a supermajority in light of the returning urban Malay votes.

"It is because of their lies to convince the Chinese that they can change the government. That was the problem. If say we have 25 per cent of Chinese support, we would have won two-thirds," he said.

Najib had previously said that the aftermath of Election 2013 saw deeper racial divide and vowed to embark on a "national reconciliation" effort to unite a split country.

Today the country's sixth premier held a closed-door meeting with all BN lawmakers where he instructed them to work harder to improve the coalition's standing, including a directive against racialising its poor performance in Sunday's ballot.

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