

**Umno relying more on rural Malay support, says writer
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 14 — The results of the recent general election show that Umno is as strong as ever despite Barisan Nasional losing the popular vote, according to a Straits Times report today.

Writing in the Singapore daily, James Chin, a senior visiting research fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Iseas), argued that many Malaysians are misreading the situation and think that Umno is weak.

He said Umno today is as strong as it was in 1971, adding that it is BN that is dying, not Umno.

"The Malay heartland, all in rural areas, backed Umno and that is why it increased its number of parliamentary seats and why there is an Umno-alone government in Kuala Lumpur today," he wrote.

In his article, he gave a rundown of the evolution of Umno from its formation in 1946 under various leaders including Datuk Onn Jaafar, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and how the party has changed over the years.

Chin wrote that the flaw in Dr Mahathir's Malay state building was the scourge of money politics. "With so much money flowing out of the government into selected Umno elite, the competition became so intense that the only way to get support was to 'buy' support."

He said money politics in Umno was tolerated because it did not contradict Malay or Islamic dominance of the system. As long as the money did not threaten Umno or Ketuanan Melayu, it was seen as a necessary evil for the functioning of Umno.

Chin also wrote that despite losing the two-thirds parliamentary majority in the 2008 general election, Umno failed to tackle the corruption issue or move to the middle ground. It cared only about control over Malay minds and control of the federal government.

He argued that reforms undertaken after 2009 were mainly cosmetic and in the economic arena; real political reforms did not take place and that is why the urban polity rejected Umno this year.

"For example, on the issue of Ketuanan Melayu, rather than deal with it, the party simply 'subcontracted' the work to Perkasa, a Malay right-wing organisation established after 2008."

He said the urban public did not buy the argument that Umno had reformed when Perkasa's president and deputy president became BN candidates this year. It became clear that Umno would not change its political leanings.

Chin said it has become increasingly clear in the past two decades that Umno is now BN and BN is Umno. Umno accounts for just less than half of Cabinet ministers. In Parliament, the overwhelming bloc within BN is always Umno. In 2008, Umno won 79 seats out of BN's 140. This year, Umno won 88 out of BN's 133 seats. In percentage terms, this translates to 56

per cent and 66 per cent respectively.

"Today after 56 years of independence, Umno still controls the rural Malay mind. Yes, it is true Umno has lost control over large sections of the Malay community in urban areas. Under Malaysia's electoral system, it is the rural seats that decide the federal government, not urban seats. Urban seats account for less than a quarter of Malaysia's 222 parliamentary seats while about 150 seats are Malay/Bumiputera-majority seats," he wrote.

Chin argued that Umno is unlikely to reform in time for the 14th GE, and does not need to. "As long as the first-past-the-post system continues to allot disproportionate weight to rural voters, all Umno has to do is to keep the fire of Ketuanan Melayu and Ketuanan Islam burning brightly in rural Malaysia," he said.

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