

Single-party BN won't bring back Chinese support, Utusan says
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 2 — Umno should tell its Barisan Nasional (BN) partners to stick to the coalition's tried-and-tested formula as the idea of a single, race-less party will not bring back the Chinese into the fold, the party's mouthpiece said in its weekend edition today.

In its column in *Mingguan Malaysia*, *Awang Selamat* — the nom-de-plume representing Umno-owned *Utusan Malaysia*'s collective editorial voice — advised the BN's anchor party against giving serious consideration to the proposal to dismantle the racial boundaries that have long been identified with the coalition, and which it insists has been and will continue to be the recipe for its success in elections.

"Be confident that Umno, PBB, MCA, MIC and the other component parties will function more efficiently with the status quo," it said, adding that "a single party is only an excuse, not a resolution" to the challenge of winning back support from the Chinese, who form about a quarter of the country's 28 million population.

The suggestion to collapse the separate compartments of BN was first floated by the Chinese-majority *Gerakan* days after the divisive May 5 polls, and gained momentum when it was echoed by several other BN component leaders.

The 13-party BN coalition maintained its hold on power but its non-Malay/Bumiputera components suffered a serious drubbing.

It managed to score 133 seats in the 222-member Parliament largely due to Umno's wins; the Malay party alone took 88 seats, nearly equal to the combined haul of the *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR) opposition, which won 89 seats, seven more than the DAP-PKR-PAS alliance had got in Election 2008.

Umno's supreme council had decided at its meeting to study the idea further.

But Umno's information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan yesterday panned the proposal, saying it is inappropriate and difficult to implement as it would not be able to represent the interests of all races in the country.

"I personally do not agree that Umno should be dissolved to create a single BN party without any components, and I'm certain that the 3.4 million Umno members too do not agree," he was reported saying in Pontian by state news wire Bernama.

The broadsheet today echoed Ahmad's view, claiming that not all the ruling coalition's members were in favour of dropping their ethnic fences, including several parties based in Sabah and Sarawak, although the paper did not name them.

It said each of the BN parties has its own characteristics and identity apart from taking into account the racial and ethnic agenda and they should not "feel ashamed" of this as the ruling coalition was still more progressive than the opposition pact.

It also said that the poor performance of certain parties in BN should not compel a drastic change.

"It is sufficient to retain the BN formula for now that is based on cooperation among the component parties," the paper said.

It advised Umno to shore up its Malay base, reminding the party that it had won the elections on the back of the community's support and should keep in mind that political transformations were possible only if the race was united.

"The most pressing issue post-GE13 is not a single party but how Umno consolidates its strengths to face GE14. And how MCA and Gerakan can recover by rebuilding their internal strengths first," Awang said.

It suggested the party work on strategic changes to strengthen its Islamic credentials and identity as well as add new members and register its youth members as voters, noting that many had not done so in time for the 13th general election.

It also pointed out that many Malay NGOs had played a key role in Umno's victory and they will be looking to see how the party repays their efforts.

"Believe me, making BN a single party is no guarantee BN will win big in GE14, make a misstep and it will fall headlong forever," it said.

It also warned Umno against giving too much space for claims from the minority races, pointing that the BN government's measures so far, naming the repeal of the Internal Security Act as an example, had not stopped them from rejecting the coalition at the polls.

"The more we entertain claims to open up, the greater the risks we face. The Chinese have chosen the DAP agenda to topple Malay political power with their push for equality.

"As long as that is not achieved, as long as Malays are not united, that will be how long Chinese will not support BN," it said.

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