

**Let Umno's grassroots decide Najib's presidency, says ex-NSTP boss**  
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**BY CLARA CHOOI**

KUALA LUMPUR, June 5 — Umno's grassroots should get to decide the fate of Datuk Seri Najib Razak as party president when internal polls are held at the year's end, former New Straits Times (NST) group editor-in-chief Datuk A. Kadir Jasin said today.

The political commentator appeared to disagree with suggestions from state-level leaderships that the party's top two posts not be contested, saying their views must take into account that it was likely Umno's grassroots leaders and members who helped save Barisan Nasional (BN) from losing Election 2013.

Without their support, he said in a blog posting today, Umno may not have scored the 88 federal seats it won during the divisive polls — a significant nine seats more than the 79 it won in Election 2008.

"It would only be reasonable to give them the right to decide if they want Najib's presidency challenged because Umno would not have won those precious 88 seats if its members or supporters had not resolved to vote for BN on May 5.

"They should also be given the space and opportunity to decide among themselves if they want Najib, whose achievements were lower, to be retained as president (and subsequently as prime minister) when they showed Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi the exit after a greater victory in 2008," Kadir wrote.

BN survived Election 2013 with a weaker majority, scoring only 133 seats to Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) 89 — a notable seven-seat margin smaller than the previously worst performance in Election 2008.

The polls saw the emergence of a divided Malaysia, a trend that was fuelled further when top leaders in Umno characterised the election results as a Chinese-versus-Malay contest.

Najib, in his victory speech on May 6, described the vote trend as a "Chinese tsunami", noting that an even greater percentage of the country's second-largest ethnic group had fled to the opposition's fold, leaving BN's non-Malay parties with a greatly reduced parliamentary representation.

Only Umno showed improvement when it took 88 parliamentary seats at a time when their coalition partners were nearly wiped out from the august House.

Today, Kadir highlighted that Najib had led a presidential-style campaign all through the polls, attempting to use his popularity as a reformist to woo support for BN.

The clear "essence" of the BN campaign, he said, was Najib's 1 Malaysia platform and the prime minister's portrayal of himself and his team as all-inclusive, particularly when rallying the Chinese and Indian voters.

But when the poll results saw these communities flee BN's side and Umno's popularity soar, Kadir said questions arose over why the vote had gone the direction it did.

"The question is, did Umno perform better because its top leaders placed priority on the party and the Malays, or were the Malays themselves afraid their powers would weaken if the Chinese parties in BN chalked bigger victories?" he asked.

Kadir suggested that it was possible the Malays had seen how the prime minister appeared too willing to curry favour with the non-Malays, and felt worried that if the MCA, MIC or Gerakan won big, their power would be usurped.

"They would have read, seen and heard of how the prime minister unrelentingly went about improving Chinese and Tamil school education, gave additional allocations to these schools, and met with several radical Chinese and Indian groups like Dong Zong and Hindraf," he said.

"But what frightened a majority of the Malays even more was the possibility of a PR victory and the emergence of the DAP as a dominant player in national politics.

"So, did Umno win bigger in the last general election because its president prioritised the Malays or because the Malays themselves felt they were no longer prioritised by the party leadership, and therefore they acted to ensure that Umno and the Malays are strengthened from bottom up," Kadir asked.

If this were the case, Kadir said it would only be fair to allow the grassroots to decide on Najib's fate when polls are called at the end of the year, instead of the party leadership arbitrarily deciding not to allow the party's presidency to be challenged.

"Furthermore, Najib himself said after the May 13 Umno supreme council meeting that Umno practises democracy and its leaders are free to be challenged," he pointed out.

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