

BN must stay in tune with the middle class, says Musa Hitam
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The Malaysian middle class is "no pushover", and the Barisan Nasional (BN) must seriously address its concerns such as corruption and misuse of power, former deputy prime minister Tun Musa Hitam told The Straits Times.

"When Malaysians are critical, it shouldn't be dismissed as them being destructive or negative. We should respect them. The middle class today thinks very differently, and the challenge for the leadership is that it should be one step ahead but it has not even kept up," the Singapore daily quoted him as saying in the republic.

"That is the problem. We (the government) have provided education to them, but yet, we've become less educated and haven't changed our mindset," he told The Straits Times in an interview on Thursday.

Malaysians have become considerably more vocal about their social, economic and political views and their demands of the government, the daily noted.

It said their disenchantment, particularly in the cities, can be gleaned from the outcome of the general election in May - BN was able to remain in power, but a significant chunk of the urban middle-class votes went to the opposition.

The 79-year-old Musa campaigned for BN at the recent polls in his home state of Johor, as did other party veterans but the ruling coalition only managed to get 133 federal seats in Election 2013, down seven from the 140 in the 2008 polls.

He also unflinchingly said the top Umno posts should be open for contest as that was in keeping with the basic principles of democracy.

"The argument that if you contest, it will divide the party, is nonsense," he said bluntly.

"That is merely a political argument that serves the incumbents or those who worry about their positions," he said in response to questions about whether the top posts in Umno ought to be challenged during the much-anticipated party polls to be held in a few months time.

This year's party polls are crucial as they will decide the future of Malaysia's leadership. Currently at the helm is party president Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak. His deputy is Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who many perceive to be one of the challengers for Umno's presidency, the paper said.

Musa was the country's deputy prime minister and Umno's deputy president between 1981 and 1986, when Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was prime minister.

The articulate and generally well-liked former politician stepped down from his DPM post after a fallout with Dr Mahathir.

Except for a brief, failed attempt to return to politics shortly in a bid with Tengku Razaleigh at ousting Dr Mahathir in the 1987 Umno elections, Musa walked away from the political

arena and has remained out of it. - July 29, 2013.

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