

## **Deafening silence from BN partners after racial slurs by Umno leaders**

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**BY ELIZABETH ZACHARIAH AND DESMOND DAVIDSON**

Silence. That seems to be the stand taken by Barisan Nasional component parties in light of some leaders in Umno who play the racial card in the run-up to its October 19 polls. Despite claiming to represent Malaysians, none of Umno's partners in the ruling coalition had immediately chided Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam for their insensitive remarks against the non-Malays, with the exception of MCA vice-president Gan Ping Sieu.

Contacted by The Malaysian Insider, these leaders only voiced their unhappiness about the recent remarks by Umno leaders.

Their stand is not surprising, noted Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies deputy director Ooi Kee Beng, who said such continued silence would only exacerbate their decline.

At the 13th general election, BN again failed to get the two-thirds majority in the 222-seat parliament, just like the 2008 national polls.

Although Umno managed to increase its parliamentary seats from 79 in 2008 to 88 in the May 5 general election, other component parties like MCA and Gerakan fared badly.

"All this shows an ingrained passivity and a lack of bold leadership within these parties. What started out as an Alliance idea of equal partners has over the years been replaced with full Umno hegemony within BN and this is the final result," Ooi said, adding that he would be surprised if Umno candidates were ticked off by their coalition partners for being seditious.

Ahmad Zahid had blamed Indians as the culprits in gang-related crimes, saying their victims were "mostly Malays". Mohd Ali, meanwhile, had accused the Chinese of being involved in illegal businesses.

Both leaders are vying for vice-presidents' posts in the Umno polls. Observers noted that such remarks were made to pander to the Umno gallery.

Gerakan acting president Datuk Chang Ko Youn said he had told Umno's top leadership that racially sensitive comments should not be tolerated.

"Just because the parties are having elections does not mean the candidates have the licence to make remarks that hurt the feelings of other communities.

"They have to bear in mind that whatever they say or do will boomerang back five years down the line in time for the 14th general election," he said.

Mouthing off racial comments to gain votes would not be fair to other component parties, said Chang, who said these parties would then bear the brunt of such actions at the next general election.

Chang appealed to candidates to have more restraint and be more responsible in their words, saying they risked undermining BN's efforts to woo back support from other

communities.

MIC Youth chief T. Mohan, who insisted he had been vocal about this, called on Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak to reprimand politicians who had hurt the feelings of Malaysians.

"We don't want the Indians and the other races to be victimised for the sake of Umno elections. They should not be going after other communities just to make it seem like they are championing their own race," he said.

Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party secretary-general Datuk Nelson Balan Rining also voiced his concerns, saying many Umno leaders "seemed to ignore the fact that Malaysia is a multi-racial country". Parti Rakyat Sarawak president Tan Sri Dr James Masing advised Umno leaders to try to be moderates.

"People outside Umno, the non-Malays, are already asking about the leaders we have. This is a very unhealthy state of affairs," Masing added. - October 9, 2013.

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