

# Malaysia: The protest vote - permanent or temporary

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The 12<sup>th</sup>. General Election sends shock waves towards the nation. As the results were coming out, one after another giant just slumbered to the ground. Sharizat, Koh Tsu Koon, Kaveas, Zam, Samy Vellu. Who could have imagined?.

The poll saw the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, lose its dominant grip on power after 40 years. Opposition parties won 82 out of the 222 seats in the parliament, a dramatic increase from the 19 seats they had held. The opposition also gained control of five of Malaysia's 13 states while it also won most of the seats contested in Federal territory.

The swing was nationwide. Five state going to the opposition – an unprecedented result. The result was much better than then 1969 election which send shock waves to the Alliance then, which resulted in an emergency and the restructuring of the alliance which what is known as the Barisan Nasional.

The Barisan Nasional continued the legacy of the Alliance in spirit and in ideology. It created a rich class getting richer by the day and divided the people using race and religion. Many times, the opposition got caught up in this game and continued to tailor their politics according to race and religious lines, in order to win a token number of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies.

This time it was different. The message was clear. While the opposition kept arguing during seat negotiation why they needed certain seats because of the racial composition, the message send out in this election is rather different and radical. The voters just got fed up with Barisan Nasional, its leaders, its promises and its lies. The people went on to punish the Government of the day, sending them packing, just 30 seats short to take over complete Federal power.

The people were not bothered which symbol they voted for as long as it was opposition. Malays voted the DAP while non-Malays voted PAS. The younger voters choosed the opposition compared to older voters while urban voters called for change compared to rural traditional votes. The Indian votes went all the way to the Opposition.

What was most surprising was the fall of Selangor and Perak to the opposition. These two state has a multiracial outlook unlike Kelantan and Terengganu or even Penang, to an extend. If Selangor and Perak can fall to Opposition control, then it won't take much time for the other states like Negeri Sembilan, Johor and Melaka and even the Parliament to fall to the Opposition.

## **When the candidate was not important**

In 2008, the people voted for change and it was more a protest vote on the ruling party rather than an endorsement for the opposition. This election also saw that it most mixed areas, the ruling party lost its grip. What was most surprising were that the voters did not bother on who the candidates were. In Most cases, they just selected the opposition party, sending a clear protest note to Barisan Nasional. The people wanted a break and a change. Those who fell along the vote swing, won while

other missed in small majorities.

This election also saw the opposition having a straight fight in most areas and the normal attack on DAP and PAS on issues such as Islamic state did not seem to impact on the voters. The Opposition especially BA (PAS & PKR) also had a simple practical manifesto which was popular.

### **What comes easy can also go easy**

This election also saw a lot of inexperienced, first timers winning the election because of the swing, sending a clear message that the candidates were not important but rather which side was the candidates belong.

Though this is really an awakening to the Barisan Nasional as acknowledged by most of the BN component parties, it is also an awakening to the Opposition parties. One should not be complacent with the result. What is demanded is real hard work and true changes which people have to realise.

What comes easy can also go easy. This is especially important for new candidates who won the seat without doing any ground work. Now is the time to prove to the voters that they have made the right choice. Candidates should immediately service their areas as well as fulfill the election manifesto.

### **The New State Government has to show character**

What is also a real test is for the new Government to show some form of character. The new government in the four states have to show that they are different. One of the most important task is to neutralize party supporters and members who may want to grab the many post or occupation which comes with victory. The new government has to come out and create a new culture. Such new paradigm shift is only possible if the new Government show good example like declaring assets, being transparent and making themselves approachable to the woman and man in the streets

The New State Government, the Chief Ministers, the New Exco has to show character in bringing about much needed change. They cannot be bureaucratic and sluggish. They have to show the differences. For example, they should do away with quota system based on race and immediately replace with based on needs. It is these policies which will ultimately unite the people from various ethnic groups and bridge the artificial gap created by BN.

### **Barisan Rakyat - who has the power ?**

The new Opposition Government is dubbed as Barisan rakyat (Peoples front). Though this may be correct as it was the rakyat's choice. But name itself is not sufficient. How the government performs will truly reflect if it is Barisan rakyat or just another administration. In order to be called Barisan Rakyat, the new Government, must at all times be reflective of the wishes of the people and always get the mandate of the people in implementing policies, must be pro people- pro workers rather than pro-investors like what is portrayed by the previous government.

We have seen many times in history and neighboring countries, that new State Government slowly becomes corrupt and make the same mistakes as the previous government. This is largely due to the failure to break the old mould and mode of thinking. It is also ideological orientated when the change of Government does not bring about a change in system of Governance.

To be Barisan Rakyat, it is critical that the New State Governments puts the interest of the people above the interest of investors and capitalist. This would be the biggest challenge to the new State Governments under PAS, DAP and PKR.

## **The role of Socialist and the left in this New environment**

PSM's voice is a sole voice in the State Government of Selangor where Dr. Nasir Hashim won a seat while in Parliament Dr. Kumar would be the first Socialist parliamentarian in 44 years. Besides this two, there are also many others from other political parties namely in PKR and DAP who share similar aspirations. There is a whole bunch of activist in the current settings like people like Sivarasa, Tian Chua, Elizabeth Wong, Chang Lee Khang, Hatta, Teng and many others.

Even now, a lot of civil rights movement have been approaching Dr. Nasir and Kumar as they want them to push and ensure many things work out in the new government. It is not going to be easy. The hope and desire for change is long overdue. People suddenly see this opportunity and want PSM members to play an important, pro-active and critical role in the Parliament and State Assemble.

It is going to be an uphill task. PSM is committed to a minimum program with the opposition parties. We support fully the Opposition BA manifesto in the state of Selangor. The Manifesto would be a basis to work together to fulfill as it covers many aspects of the needs of the people and the workers. The manifesto truly reflects the slogan of a welfare state in many ways.

Other critical joint ventures which PSM has been having with the other parties like the abolishment of the ISA, freedom of assemble, against the FTAs, privatization of public health care and many others can only be realized if the Federal Government falls. In order to accomplish this, it is important for the five opposition run state Governments to win the confidence of the people. It is important for the parties to work together to win the hearts of the people so that this protest vote will become permanent.

Besides that, PSM who had been working with the workers, the urban poor , the farmers have an additional task of being the voice of these communities in Parliament and the state assemblies. But a mere sole voice in State Assembly and Parliament, is not going to do wonders. While PSM works hand in hand with PKR, PAS and DAP to ensure the ruling parties in the five new states perform and built on the trust of the people. Yet the party should continue to built and empower the peoples' movement to be a parallel power to ensure that the politics is not just resigned to the state assemblies and Parliament.

The people's movement has an increasing role to ensure that the elected reps play an important role and to be truly representative of their aspirations. Like what is stated in PSM's manifesto - Building People's Power. It is important that the people continue to feel empowered all the time and not once in four or five years. Politics should not be the monopoly of a few. It is therefore our biggest task to ensure politics and change remain with the majority of the people and the workers.