

## Barisan still in denial

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Poor Barisan Nasional. No matter what, in the eyes of Malaysians, Barisan can do no right. Anywhere between one and five by-elections may be coming soon, and it is a virtual certainty that Barisan will lose each of them, quite possibly by immense margins. Barisan is still busy patting itself on the back for toppling the popular Perak government; it hasn't done anything to address the fundamental reasons why the voters consistently reject its leadership. Eventually, Barisan will have to face the public, and when it does, it will not have even the slightest fig leaf to cover its blatant failures.

Last March, was shell-shocked beyond belief when the polling results came in. Barisan leaders could not understand or comprehend the unprecedented and massive rejection they encountered at the hands of Malaysians. In the wake of March 8, Barisan conducted much "soul-searching" in an effort to figure out exactly what happened. Surely, they would come around eventually, get their act together, and try to win back the hearts of the people.

But a year later, Barisan is still as shocked and in denial as ever before. Just looking at their actions in the recent Perak crisis, it is crystal clear that they still think they are facing the same political situation as they did several years ago. Barisan leaders were clearly not expecting the massive backlash from Perakians and Malaysians; the Prime Minister-to be and other top Barisan leaders have been pulling out from various scheduled functions because of "security concerns"—the moment they show their face in public, they will be tormented like no Malaysian leader has ever been before. They have clearly misjudged public sentiment: Barisan really seems to believe that all it needs to do is to claw its power back from Pakatan Rakyat, by hook or by crook, and then all will be well again.

Barisan does not seem to grasp at all that at some point or another, it will have to face the public at the ballot box. Even if Datuk Najib Razak hides his face for the next four years, he will have to face another electoral battle eventually. And as long as Barisan does not address any of the reasons why public sentiment is overwhelmingly behind Pakatan, the public will continue to reject Barisan's leadership in ever larger numbers.

Barisan does not understand that the public voted for Pakatan because they actually believe in the ideals and principles Pakatan stands for. Malaysians are tired of age-old economic inequities and political injustices which Barisan persists in shoving under the carpet. Pakatan went beyond acknowledging these problems; each of its component parties unveiled substantially similar plans to address them.

Amongst all the states in the country, it is not an exaggeration to say that until last month, Perak was one of the best governed. Pakatan proved in Perak that its loose coalition is more than a marriage of convenience. In spite of having a Pas menteri besar in a substantially non-Malay populated state with numerous DAP state representatives, the Pakatan government not only proved to be administratively efficient, but keenly tackled injustices which had previously been ignored by Barisan governments. It is no accident at all that Datuk Seri Nizar Jamaluddin is now a household name throughout the country, nor that excitable bloggers are now proclaiming him to be the best menteri besar Perak has ever had.

Perakians and Malaysians at large are now angry and upset, not just because Barisan has toppled a

democratically-elected government, but because Barisan has toppled a very real and effective symbol of justice and efficiency in our country. During his 11-month administration, Nizar ran a tight ship based on the principles Pakatan stands for. In Perak, Pakatan delivered on its promises.

If Barisan wants to cut its losses in the court of public opinion, it has to become more like Pakatan. The public is not supporting Pakatan just on a whim; the public is throwing its support behind Pakatan because no other party or coalition is intent on addressing the problems Pakatan raises. Barisan continues to act as if the voters owe it a favour, instead of trying to understand and address the problems voters face.

Unfortunately for Barisan, it looks as if its leaders will not be changing their tack any time soon. Judging from their handling of the Perak crisis, it is clear that Barisan still believes it can hang on to power and ride out the challenge from Pakatan. But as long as Barisan ignores the problems Pakatan tackled in Perak, and continues to tackle in four other states, it cannot hope to ever win back the support of the public. As long as Barisan persists in ignoring corruption, injustice and incompetence, it can count on the public rejecting it overwhelmingly at the polls, time and time again.

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