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Johor sweep shows it is Barisan bastion

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JOHOR BARU, Tues. - The Barisan Nasional ran true to form with its clean sweep of all 20 parliamentary and 40 State seats, further enhancing its reputation as a BN and Umno bastion.

The BN has enjoyed such overwhelming majorities at the polls here election after election, and the pro-BN sentiment is so entrenched statewide, that even Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed has said visiting Johor had always given him immense pleasure, for they never failed to leave him feeling happy, confident and upbeat.

Still, what took many by surprise was the convincing manner in which the BN won the day.

For all the gripping tension of the election up north, and the inroads made by Pas and Keadilan elsewhere, in Johor the combined power of the opposition front hardly registered a dent.

No doubt, the local BN machinery is formidable, well-funded and extremely effective.

Some BN candidates did have their majorities reduced but the expected swing in votes to the Opposition that had been expected in some "hot spots" failed to materialise.

To attribute this solely to the oft-banded explanation of Johor being the birthplace of Umno is too simplistic and shallow an analysis.

Former State DAP chairman S.K.Song, who contested and lost the Tambatan State seat on the PRM ticket, admitted that the Opposition here had misread the local mood.

The rather low voter turnout in some areas was also a disadvantage for the Opposition, but its difficult to "read" what this meant.

Were voters really unable to make up their minds? Or was it some kind of message from the traditional BN voters, who were too deep-rootedly pro-establishment to vote for the Opposition, but who still wanted to send some signal to the higher-ups?

As elsewhere, the Opposition lost ground heavily when it came to the Chinese votes. While this was not unexpected, the extent of the swing of the Chinese and Indian votes to the BN took both sides by complete surprise.

There is little doubt that the marriage of convenience between the secular DAP and PRM with the Islamic Pas effectively spooked the Chinese.

Even the "lets-vote-for-the-Opposition-just-to-give-the-BN-a-hard-time" type Chinese votes that the DAP and PRM could traditionally rely on, totally abandoned them this time round.

Chinese voters, while generally open-minded to the idea of having some kind of Opposition in the State Assembly, were however terrified of the implications of the DAP-PRM alliance with Pas and found the Opposition Front too incongruous to be a viable alternative.

The non-Malays felt that now more than ever was not the time to take chances.

As for the majority of Malays, the slogan of "Do not shoot yourself in the foot by killing off your own kind," made popular by local State Executive Councillor and MCA man Dr Chua Soi Lek, proved potent.

The thumping victory is also an endorsement of the back-to-basics policies of Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

The effectiveness of Ghani's policies meant that there were not too many issues the Opposition could ride on at State-level, and most voters were

in no hurry to ruffle the comfortable blanket of relative economic security and freedom that they enjoyed, just to make some political point.

Finally, in stark contrast to elsewhere in the country, the election in Johor was notable for its glaring monotony.

In the final analysis, the underlying message of the "Johor Sweep" was a vote for stability and continuity.