

Perspective 101 for the pro-Pakatan folk

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COMMENT On Sunday, over 30 Malaysian students at the University of Nottingham at the heart of England in the United Kingdom decided to procrastinate studying for a day and catch the election results together.

In the absence of kopitiams, we opted to book a comfortable teaching room on campus for the day.

NONE So we sat there the whole day, fully knitted out in election-watching gear: in front of us a big screen streaming live news, laptops on the tables, smartphones in one hand and a bag of chips in the other.

People went in and out throughout the day; there was a Malaysian flag at the door and the news boomed throughout the hallway, so it wasn't hard to find.

The atmosphere was terrific, but it was also decidedly pro-opposition. People went bananas at every positive update on Nurul Izzah Anwar and Lim Kit Siang.

I privately felt bad for any BN supporters who may have been in the room (not that there necessarily were).

It is ironic, given that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak studied industrial economics here; on that day it seemed the premier's party was not getting much love from his alma mater.

No wonder he hasn't visited so far.

Then Barisan began outpacing Pakatan in the seat tally. By the time they had clinched over 90 seats, a wet blanket of depression had the room bogged down.

When BN hit the 112 mark, people began leaving, somewhat dispirited. Meanwhile, Twitterjaya exploded with fury.

Pakatan supporters need some perspective. The pact still improved on its 2008 performance by grabbing seven more seats, and the government lost the popular vote for the first time since 1969.

Political burying of the past

Given the gerrymandering in the system, Pakatan may have needed closer to 60 percent of the popular vote across the board just to get over 112 seats - an unrealistic swing of over 10 percent.

Just as it was in 2008, many veteran politicians lost this time as well.

NONE Former Malacca chief minister Ali Rustam lost his bid for Parliament; ministers Raja Nong Chik Raja Zainal Abidin (right), Kong Cho Ha and Bernard Dompok were also rejected, joining the likes of Chua Soi Lek, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil and S Samy Vellu.

And who can forget Gelang Patah, the mother of all GE13 fights?

But my personal favourite result has to be the wiping out of both Perkasa candidates, Ibrahim Ali and Zulkifli Noordin.

The double-barrelled repudiation is a slap to both the extremist Perkasa and its patron, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, hopefully Ibrahim will lay low for a while.

We should be happy that Pakatan still progressed, and that Barisan did not get another chance to abuse a two-thirds Parliamentary supermajority.

The sharing of the White House and United Nations petitions was an ill-advised knee-jerk reaction predicated on short-term gains in ignorance of its long-term implications.

Put aside the fact that neither the US nor the UN would risk intervening when only a fraction of a country's citizens ask for it, and that such an intervention would be illegal.

Allowing such an intervention would set a dangerous precedent where countries could impose their will on others, merely because elections are thought to be unfair or because a few citizens complained.

Goose and gander factor

We had the same problem in 2008. Anwar Ibrahim promised a Malaysia Day takeover of the government (that did not materialise), and plenty of people were willing to support him.

But when the Perak state government takeover happened a number of months

later, his supporters went nuts.

Can we not see how these instant gratification-type tactics can easily be turned against us?

Some even went as far as pronouncing democracy dead and that they would be leaving the country.

My response: if democracy is dead because elections are skewed, then ours died years ago.

If democracy dies because a party can lose the popular vote but still form the government, then democracy died in the United Kingdom decades before.

The reasoning I saw is at best emotional and indicative of passion. At worst, it's a thinking-before-typing variant of immaturity that we will have to outgrow if we want a better result in 2018.

Thankfully, not everyone was about the doom and gloom. Second-year law student Ooi Jian Rong expected the results to go "exactly as it went".

Slow and steady wins the race

For him, the historical nature of the election and the experience of watching it unfold with his fellow Malaysians were more important.

"Admittedly, the hype generated online has made it irresistible to not study... I feel somewhat calm but at the same time happy to be surrounded by so many Malaysians," he said.

Asked about his thoughts on Najib as an alumnus of the university, he said he would give Najib credit if the prime minister's association with the university helped the opening of its Malaysian campus in Semenyih.

"If the fact that the University of Nottingham was his alma mater was instrumental in bringing [the university] to Malaysia, then perhaps I should thank him for that."

One medical student, Fikri, expected slightly better of Pakatan but remained realistic, agreeing that foreign intervention was unnecessary and that democracy was certainly not dead.

NONEAs for his thoughts on others' reactions, he expressed disappointment at

racist comments but was glad to see a strong backlash against such responses.

"I thought Barisan was going to win with a simple majority but they still garnered more seats than I expected they would, considering Pakatan's popularity.

"But I wouldn't go so far as to say Malaysia has gone to hell, and democracy is dead.

"I think we're getting there slowly," he added.

Another student, first-year undergraduate Andrea Lau, was more let down. Writing on her blog later that day, she confessed to tearing up at the results.

"I admit I cried. Only things closest to my heart can make me tear up," she wrote.

However, she added that "the tears shed today would not be in vain", pledging to prepare for the next election due in five years' time.

We could do with a little more of this perspective; if the Nottingham Malaysians are any indication, there is hope yet for 2018.

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