

The Elections Bullshit
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By Kee Thuan Chye

I asked a number of prominent and concerned Malaysians to write their thoughts on 'What can Malaysians look forward to between now and GE14?' and appended questions they could also address if they wished to, such as what concrete measures BN or Pakatan Rakyat, or both, should take to bring about positive changes; what Malaysian citizens could do to push for these positive changes; and what needs to be done to ensure GE14 will be fair to all contesting parties. And, here are their responses:

Ambiga Sreenevasan, co-chairperson, Bersih

There is a crying need for an independent Election Commission. We have said it before and we have to say it again and again. This EC has to go.

NONEThe EC shows no remorse. Nor does it take any responsibility for the flaws in the system. Instead, the EC is always blaming others. Its bias towards the ruling party is obvious, and the EC does not even try to hide it.

It is speeding ahead to do the constituency re-delineation exercise based on the present electoral roll, even as the Sabah RCI discloses so many cases of fraud. People must realise that once the re-delineation is done, we will be stuck with it for at least eight years! I can then assure you that nothing will radically change during GE14.

Our priority must be the cleaning-up of the electoral roll. It is so vital that if the EC and the government do not respond positively and immediately to this, the people will have no choice but to prepare for Bersih 4.0. This is not a threat, it is a promise!

Adam Adli, student leader and activist

I know, many people will say that we have taken to the streets too many times. And yet nothing has changed. Many people have said that we are not being rational by taking to the streets, and we are looked upon as a violent crowd.

NONELet me ask them: what is the main goal of taking to the streets? It is to protest, isn't it? But what our critics don't understand is that a protest is just

another process, a very necessary process.

If we stop protesting, we stop the process. Without continuing the process, how on earth can we achieve the result? And even so, given the fact that, yes, we've taken to the streets many times and the result is still the same, this time around we will make sure that Bersih 4.0 will not be the same Bersih. And perhaps we might get a different result.

Andrew Sia, writer and adventurer

BN and Pakatan should engage in bipartisan cooperation. They can look beyond scoring political points and instead work together to benefit the people - and themselves.

For example, the federal government should stop blocking the LRT project proposed by the Penang state government. The people of Penang will enjoy better transport, there will be economic spin-off gains and the environment and tourism will improve, too.

It's time to think of creative ways to move forward. The current situation reminds me of the stalemate of trench warfare during World War I: both sides were dug in, and all they knew to do was to sledgehammer each other in frontal assaults, with more and more artillery, mass infantry charges, etc.

Millions lost their lives fighting over a few hundred yards of land in ultimately pointless battles.

Compare this to the blitzkrieg tactics that the Germans used in World War II. Instead of hammering strong points (like in the previous world war), the new method of attack was always about sidestepping them, seeking creative ways around resistance.

Art Harun, writer, observer and lawyer

I look forward to a more accountable government, more transparent (at the very least less opaque) governance and more lively and healthy debates on issues affecting the people and the nation.

The BN government really has to tackle the interfaith-race issues unemotionally and based on facts and data. That is tops on my wish list. The emergence and continued rise of the Islamist agenda worries me. So does the rising crime rate.

I wish Pakatan will be unemotional, too. It is not sufficient to oppose the government; it must be done with hard facts and data, coupled with constructive suggestions. Pakatan can also lead the way in fostering inter-faith-race harmony. Penang, Selangor and Kelantan can carry out activities to promote this.

Lee Kam Hing, academician

The two coalitions should occupy the middle and moderate grounds of Malaysian politics. Leaders of both sides must be willing to speak up boldly against those advocating narrow interests, whose intentions are to marginalise and exclude Malaysians on the basis of religion or race.

It is instructive to note that some of the positive changes being pushed for by Malaysians today are what early Malaysians had fought for, especially during the independence movement. Hence, one cannot overemphasise the importance of history in helping to address some of the problems facing the country.

There should be an urgent review of school history textbooks. It must be based on a careful re-look at historical records and a willingness to allow debates on diverse interpretations of what happened in the past. This will contribute to an understanding of the emergence of our nation, of how various institutions like the judiciary, Parliament, Malay royalty and our constitution evolved and what their roles should be.

Tricia Yeoh, public policy analyst and writer

The BN ought to rein-in top political leaders who have the greatest connections with companies that gain from lucrative contracts/tenders/concessions.

NONEWith the assistance of public institutions that must be given the independence to act without political interference (like the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, judiciary, Auditor-General's Chambers, Registrar of Companies, etc), the federal government should identify which of these companies are selected because of political connections, and investigate actual financial amounts that are possibly pocketed for personal gain.

Ramon Navaratnam, chairperson, Asli Centre of Public Policy Studies

First, the government must remove the outdated concept of ketuanan. Second, ensure good governance. Step up the fight against corruption, which appears to be getting worse! Third, combat poverty more strenuously.

Fourth, improve the rule of law. Fifth, the New Economic Policy (NEP) should be replaced by the National Economic Model (NEM), which gives more attention to merit and competition to enable a major trading nation like ours to protect and sustain our economic achievements.

The preoccupation with bumiputera equity ownership (30 percent) should be phased out as most of the targets have been achieved. If there is still some doubt, an independent international organisation should be commissioned to make a public study. This preoccupation with 30 percent ownership will prevent us from breaking out of the middle income trap!

Sixth, democracy has to be made more meaningful and vibrant. Local elections have to be reintroduced to strengthen our democratic process and allow for greater people's participation.

Arnold Puyok, political analyst based in Sabah and Sarawak

The election results in Sabah indicate that the state's fixed deposit status remains, but it is set to be challenged in the next election due to the saliency of issues in the Kadazandusun and Chinese areas.

The Opposition's increased electoral gains in Sabah also show that the electorate can no longer be influenced by the lure of development aid. Sabahans have become more politically aware of their democratic rights and will choose political parties that can best fight for their interests.

Ooi Kee Beng, political philosopher

NONESwitching from inter-party politicking to nation-building is the big challenge for both sides. More than ever, given the sophisticated audience we are now dealing with, the two coalitions will have to compete at being perceived as the one practising true statesmanship.

The reforming of journalism in Malaysia is key to the future maturity of the country. While the government can help by passing liberal legislation, the people - readers and writers - hold the key to raising journalistic standards to the point where public discourses and policy-making are rational, mature, fair and worthy of the country envisioned under Vision 2020.

Azmi Sharom, academician

GE14, perhaps more than any of the previous elections, will be the people's

election. This is because there has never been a time in our history when the Malaysian people are more aware and more able to obtain meaningful information.

NONETake the re-delineation exercise that the EC is going to undertake soon. Perhaps, for the first time, what used to be within the sphere of political parties and a handful of political scholars and analysts is now a matter of genuine interest for a public eager to observe and to critique it.

And we must do so as the uneven delineation of constituencies, the result of decades of gerrymandering, is perhaps the most vital weakness in our electoral system.

Oon Yeoh, journalist and author

What BN should do is realise and understand why so many voters opt for Pakatan. It's no longer just about bread and butter issues. "It's the economy, stupid" just doesn't apply any more.

What the people aspire for today is more than just jobs and allocations for schools and so on. Things like human rights, anti-corruption, freedom of speech, rule of law and accountability - all of which only the chattering class cared about previously - are now things that matter to the man-in-the-street. Sadly, there is nothing to indicate that BN understands this at all.

Pakatan needs to sort things out within the coalition so that it is able to present a common stand on potentially contentious issues such as education, race and religion. It also needs to have the courage of its convictions to present a shadow cabinet. This will show the electorate that it is ready to be the next government.

Azly Rahman, academician, educator, columnist and author

We need to see more of a "brainstorming and problem-solving cabinet" rather than endless conflicts that will waste the time needed to resolve pressing issues and bring the nation to greater heights.

We have a highly intelligent rakyat wishing to see a level playing field designed from the ruins of racism, bigotry and capitalism, without social conscience. We need to honour the voice of the rakyat and serve it well. Collectively, we must immediately remove politicians who are corrupt to the core, and "ramadhanise" the system once and for all.

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