

BN no worse in the west, no better in the east
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Former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who "hates to predict", thinks that the ruling Barisan Nasional will do better in the next general election. This is the second time that he has come out with such a prediction, which borders more on wishful thinking and living on hope.

Not that many days ago, he had already predicted that the BN would do better in the next general election, but fall short of a two-thirds majority. Is this a prediction or fortune-telling along the lines of the card-picking bird in a cage by the five-foot way?

NONEAs far as predictions go, Mahathir (left) tells us nothing new. He has probably read more than he should have into the washing of dirty linen that dominated the Parti Keadilan Rakyat polls. The polls are over and the party is none the worse for it. One swallow, Zaid Ibrahim, does not make a spring.

The opposition alliance, Pakatan Rakyat, remains as strong as ever, if not having emerged stronger from the PKR crisis. The formidable strength of Pakatan lies not in PKR but in DAP and PAS, both tried and tested political parties, and the fact that the allies can agree to take on BN one-to-one.

That arrangement will remain, whether de facto PKR chief Anwar Ibrahim is in or out of jail. Between Lim Kit Siang of the DAP and Hadi Awang of PAS, Pakatan remains strong and will drag PKR along, screaming and kicking.

Zaid's proposed new party will not join the BN as hoped by Prime Najib Abdul Razak at Umno annual general assembly Minister Najib Abdul Razak (right). Zaid might sometimes be seen as a trouble-creator, but he knows which side his bread is buttered. He has already ruled out heading any "third force" in Peninsular Malaysia, which can only accommodate Pakatan and the BN.

So, his new party will stick with Pakatan, unless he's not welcome. The only one who can block Zaid's entry into PR is Anwar, who, in a case of temporary insanity, might rail against his former party mate's presence in the opposition alliance. In that case, Zaid will ally himself with a Borneo-based third force, which will emerge as a national party or national coalition.

Either way, Pakatan will not lose, in case BN thinks that it can capitalise on the situation.

The third force, if it emerges in time for the next general election, will be more inclined to lean towards Pakatan rather than BN. It will be a tough sell for the BN to woo the third force, which has burst into the national consciousness not so much because of Pakatan, but more so because of Umno and BN.

A temporary marriage of convenience?

The third force remains, as from before, against Umno/BN but it may only align itself with Pakatan in a temporary marriage of convenience. The parting of ways between the third force and PR does not mean, by any stretch of the imagination, that the former wants to

patch up with the BN.

We have arrived at this juncture so far not so much by predictions, wishful thinking, living on hope or fortune telling but scientifically by connecting the dots methodically, extrapolation and logical deductions.

The consensus of opinion on the ground among people from various walks of life across both sides of the South China Sea is that BN can do no worse in Peninsular Malaysia at the next innings, and do no better in Sabah and Sarawak.

When we move into the realm of method in madness, it's a certainty that BN will lose anything up to a third of the state seats in Sabah and Sarawak. It's not possible for it to repeat its 2008 electoral performance in both states.

As far as the parliamentary seats go, the opposition aims to pick up NONEat least 10 seats in Sabah and a further 10 seats in Sarawak. In that sense Anwar was pragmatic in factoring in only 10 parliamentary seats each in Sabah and Sarawak in the opposition's march to Putrajaya. It won't be an easy march either because Pakatan is unlikely to pick up all the 20 parliamentary seats of the opposition, for some could be taken by the third force.

In short, it will not be business as usual in Sabah and Sarawak for Umno and the BN or for Pakatan either.

Expect Pakatan to keep Kelantan, Penang

In peninsular Malaysia, Pakatan can be expected to maintain its stranglehold in Kelantan and Penang and it will most probably keep Selangor, despite a "2004 Terengganu-like" reversal fears expressed by DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang (below). In Kedah and Perak, it will be 50:50 for PR and 45:55 (lose) for the BN in these two states.

In case Pakatan has a reversal in Perak or Kedah, it will be in only one of the two states and not both. BN is unlikely to win both states since that would be a tall order. In the case of a one win, one loss for Pakatan in Perak/Kedah, the betting is that Pakatan will win back Perak but just about lose Kedah in the process.

selangor pakatan convension 070310 lim kit siangShould Pakatan lose either Perak or Kedah, the chances are bright for the coalition to re-capture Terengganu or win either Negri Sembilan or Malacca.

The bottomline is that, give or take some shifting of electoral possessions, the status quo will remain in peninsular Malaysia. The damper in this picture is Umno doing a PKR and opening its doors in Peninsular Malaysia to Indians and Chinese.

Another would be the Human Rights Party Malaysia, the unofficial political wing of Hindraf Makkal Sakthi, contesting 15 parliamentary seats and 38 state seats in peninsular Malaysia without clinching a one-to-one pact with Pakatan. That would spell trouble for the opposition alliance.

Will all the above developments bring PR within striking distance of Putrajaya? Yes, it will but that doesn't mean that the opposition alliance will be able to score the winning goal. It's more than likely that Umno/BN will still maintain control in Putrajaya come 2013, or on whichever earlier date the general election is called.

The earlier the general election is called, the greater the chance of the opposition taking Putrajaya and vice-versa. Both Najib and Mahathir are in fact acutely aware of this dangerous game of brinkmanship and appear in no great hurry now to call for an early general election.

Still, who knows what new information will surface to propel these two men in panic mode to press the buttons prematurely and gamble on the odds.

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