

Long live the e-revolution!
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Congratulations to the parties, candidates and supporters of Barisan Rakyat on the results of the 12th general election. The outcome was more exciting and encouraging than even the most optimistic of us could have dared hope for. MCPX

election voter 2008 vote ballot boxIt was a stunning moral victory against seemingly impossible odds. And it was only these outrageous odds in Barisan Nasional's favour - from massive gerrymandering of electorates to its manipulation of the mainstream media - that denied the nation the change of government it sorely needs and has now shown that it dearly desires.

BN may have kept its grip on power for now, but five years of government by a long-ruling regime that knows it needs to reform itself or die, with a resurgent opposition that's increasingly ready to put it out of its misery, may prove a salutary transitional stage in Malaysia's political evolution.

As maddeningly slow as it can be at times to those of us impatient to see an end of a regime like BN, evolution sure beats revolution in the long haul. Revolutions, coups and other sudden, dramatic and drastic shifts of power have a way of replacing one unbearable tyranny with another that, after the initial popular euphoria has died down, turns out to be equally evil or even, if possible, worse.

Witness the dismal long-term effects of communist revolutions in Russia, China, Cuba and elsewhere; the atrocious results of armed power-grabs as in Soeharto's Indonesia, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Saddam Hussein's Iraq and the generals' Burma; and the catastrophic consequences of theocratic take-overs in the Ayatollah's Iran and the Taliban's Afghanistan.

internet media and print mediaIn the light of such cases as these, Malaysia is fortunate to have been spared the blood, tears, terrors and likely disappointments of revolution in favour of political evolution. Or, more specifically, e-revolution. Because, as everyone must be aware by now, what's made this election such a watershed is the power of the Internet.

BN thought it understood this, but the election results demonstrated that it had no idea what it was dealing with. Attempting to write-off bloggers as nothing but "nuisances", "liars" and "unemployed women" was its first mistake, given that the bloggosphere boasted such political heavyweights as Lim Kit Siang and Anwar Ibrahim and a whole galaxy of increasingly heavy-hitters like Raja Petra Kamarudin, Rocky Attan, Jeff Ooi, Haris Ibrahim, Elizabeth Wong, Susan Loone, Bernard Khoo, K Temoc, Lulu and thousands of others as effective but too numerous to name here.

And unlike BN and its media minions, including a whole squadrons of 'mainstream' journalists-for-rent ranging from Kalimullah Hassan of the New Straits Times to Joceline Tan of Star, most of the bloggers systematically built their credibility by telling the truth, at least as they see or are able to ascertain it.

The Net strikes back

It brings us to BN's second and ultimately most self-damaging failure to understand the power of the Internet. As revealed by its massive and no doubt publicly-funded pre-election banner-ad blitz, it still perceives the Net as just like one of the old media: a platform for persuading and if possible totally brainwashing 'consumers' by repeating a pack of lies ad nauseam.

But the true power of the Net lies in its capacity to deliver and disseminate not mind-numbing repetition but its absolute opposite: novelty. Breaking news, instant views, raw, uncensored opinion and wild if often well-founded rumour. In other words, the Internet empowers its users with the ultimate weapon against a BN-style culture of secrecy and lies: instant and international exposure.

bersih istana negara memo 150208 People hate being kept in the dark and lied to, and the more repeatedly it happens the more bitterly they resent and strive to circumvent such victimisation.

Hence the success of a Malaysiakini, Malaysia Today or any other source of sensational revelations gleaned from their own informants or coverage of major events like the Bersih and Hindraf rallies, from stories by rare honest local journalists like Citizen Nades, and from global sources as diverse as news-agencies, Wikipedia and YouTube.

hort of banning, filtering or otherwise limiting access to the Internet as in Burma, by way of just one example, governments are helpless against its powers to expose them. They can try, as China does by jailing dissident bloggers, or as BN has attempted in past raids on Malaysiakini and more recent actions against Nat Tan, Raja Petra, Rocky Attan and Jeff Ooi, to intimidate them into silence.

But with people of the courage and calibre that the blogosphere attracts, intimidation doesn't work. In fact it only results in a backlash, enlisting vastly stronger support for the people and sites, even to the extent of now helping get Jeff Ooi elected to Parliament and Elizabeth Wong to a state seat.

E-volving e-lectorate?

And now, while Malaysians wait, patiently or otherwise, to vote in the next general election, the whole nation has five years to watch the next stage in the nation's political e-volution.

kampar road dap 030308 kit siang email pm With an unprecedented 82 seats in Parliament, will the Barisan Rakyat follow the copybook example that pioneers like Lim Kit Siang, Wan Azizah and Karpal Singh have shown in the past, and provide a powerful, professional opposition, complete with shadow ministers to monitor members of the cabinet?

Will they be ready to rule come the next election? Or will they fall into factionalism or, worse, prove as venal, meretricious and mendacious as the government itself?

Will the five states run by Barisan Rakyat truly be transformed into beacons of transparency, accountability and the rule of law, or will we still see the law of the jungle prevail as in the regimes they've inherited from BN?

abdullah ahmad badawi polling day vote 080308 05 Then there's the question of BN itself. Under pressure from a resurgent opposition and the urgent need to reform, can it mutate into a survivor?

Or will it keep handing its leadership to troglodytes like Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Najib Abdul Razak, Hishammudin Hussein and Khairy Jamaluddin, and lumber on to extinction like some kind of political Tyrannosaurus Wrecks?

And what about the electorate? Can Malaysia's missing links, the five million adults too apathetic or lazy to register on the rolls, be persuaded by the next election to e-volve into voting citizens?

Whatever e-volution brings, one thing's for sure. The blogging community will be e-agerly watching. And working, as always, for e-mancipation from crime, corruption and injustice; e-economic openness and honesty; and e-quality of opportunity for all Malaysians.

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