

Malaysia's new dawn?
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It's a sizzling hot day in Australia, but it can't possibly beat the political blaze that has engulfed Malaysia following the March 8 national poll. Unlike 1969, there are no race riots after Barisan MCPX Nasional, the ruling coalition, has had its two-thirds majority humiliatingly slashed, but still giving it enough seats to retain power. What a pity.

Yet in every sense, BN constituted by the Umno, MCA and MIC has been routed. No, mauled and gutted. The hugely corrupt, incompetent and dictatorial regime, led by narrow, racist Malay interests within Umno, deserved every bit of the battering. Those within the BN who lost deserved to lose. Those who won did so not by their popularity or competence but more likely by their corrupt 'money politics' and electoral gerrymandering, overseen by the totally inept and shady Election Commission. Despite this, the election was, on the whole, run reasonably fairly and openly.

Perhaps that'll be BN's sore point for some time. Since the race riots in 1969, playing dirty is how BN has kept overwhelming power. Under former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad, BN came close to being flogged in 1986. But Mahathir survived through more repressive politics. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was handpicked to be Mahathir's successor in 2003, won the last poll in 2004 by a landslide, all on a strings of dirty politics and wild and woolly promises, few of which ever materialised. His ineptitude is staggering.

This poll, Abdullah says, shows democracy in Malaysia is alive. Pigs might fly too. Democracy is a long way from being forged in a country with a serious deficit of genuine democratic institutions, including genuine commitment by political leaders on all sides towards instituting real democratic ideals. Actions always speak louder than words. Truism is lost on Malaysia, with its raft of ideological twaddle like 'Malay Boleh' and 'Wawasan 2020', that are a ridiculous criminal waste that has served to enrich the regime's cronies.

Abdullah must be having nightmares after the poll. Mahathir is right: Abdullah is responsible for BN's and Umno's slaying. As Abdullah looked gloomily at the results that has unravelled his coalition, his deputy, Najib Razak, was quietly beaming. Abdullah won't be premier for much longer. Knives are being sharpened and trained on his back and front for taking Umno and the BN to its worst showing since 1969. Abdullah is no Caesar but his death by a thousand cuts on the floor of Umno's headquarters in the Putra World Trade Centre looks certain.

What's next for BN?

Umno will be soul-searching to reinvent itself. If it's to be led by Najib, Mahathir's pined favourite, Umno's name will be mud. Najib's reputation is charred by his association with his adviser Abdul Razak Baginda's indictment for the grimy murder of a Mongolian part-time model.

If Umno is flanked by its Youth leaders Hishammuddin Hussein, son of Malaysia's second prime minister, and Khairy Jamaluddin, Abdullah's suddenly wealthy son-in-law - both of whom are unreserved Malay ultra-nationalist racists - then Malaysia still has a long way to go towards approaching a genuine democracy that'll legitimately represent all Malaysians

and all races and not only Malay Muslims, the majority race. Umno is going nowhere, no matter how polished the wine bottles.

Significantly, the result delivers the near demise of the MIC and, clearly, the political death of its most incompetent leader, S Samy Vellu. So humiliated was he for losing his own seat on his 72nd birthday to his chief nemesis, PKR's D Jeyakumar, that he scurried from politics with his tail between his legs, muttering a sore-loser's 'goodbye' to the waiting media and a handful of his pitiable loyalists.

The MIC won only nine of its 28 seats. That's not a battering; that's annihilation 'ethnic cleansing' of an Indian party by Indian voters. Worse, the MIC will now struggle to find a credible new leader. No easy task, given that most potential candidates are already tainted by their ex-master's corrupt tutelage.

Whoever the next MIC leader, he'll have to win back the trust of Indian voters. It may be too late, especially after the MIC silently acquiesced to Umno's long brutalising of Indian rights, bulldozing Indian temples, unleashing violent attacks by the state's pusillanimous security apparatus on peaceful street protests of disgruntled Indians led by Hindraf, whose leaders were summarily jailed, without recourse to the courts, thanks to the cowardly regime's Internal Security Act.

The BN slaughter doesn't end there. In 2004, the opposition parties won just 21 seats. This time, it picked up a whopping 82 seats. There's more. The opposition has also picked four key states Penang, Perak, Selangor and Kedah with the fundamentalist Islamic PAS strengthening its grip on Kelantan. The BN had said, with astounding arrogance, that it had the poll all sewn up. It turned out to be a Chinese stitch.

After 39 years, Gerakan, a staunch BN partner, has been pummeled by the poll and tossed out of Penang. Its leader and state chief minister, Koh Tsu Koon, has been run out of office. Koh had long surrendered control of the state's administrative power to Umno. Now, promises of his carving out a federal political career lies in ruins far worse than Pompeii's.

The same electoral whitewash has been replicated in Malay-dominated Kedah, Selangor and to a lesser extent Perak. What this says is that, like the Indians and the hamfisted MIC, even Malay voters have thrashed the corruption-ridden Umno, as Chinese voters have turned in droves from the equally scandal-ridden MCA towards the opposition DAP.

What a pleasant shock

My cynicism of Malaysians' willingness to vote against the regime for fear of state reprisals is disapproved up to a point. This poll result is a shock. But what a pleasant shock. Perhaps this is a new day in Malaysia's political history. It's early days, but PKR, led by former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim, exemplifies this country-wide attitudinal change. Abdullah ran scared and called an election before Anwar's imminent eligibility to vie for political office again on April 14.

Nonetheless, PKR has made such a strong and pervasive showing this time around, and Anwar is on his way back. The best and most convincing articulation of PKR's popularity among Malay and non-Malay voters alike is the electoral victories of Anwar's wife Wan Azizah and their eldest daughter, the eloquent and intelligent Nurul Izzah. The BN's newly-acquired sycophants like Chandra Muzaffar should be wiping rotten egg off their faces.

Malaysian voters should have buried the corrupt BN. This still could happen at the next poll in 2013. Regardless, Malaysians have presented Abdullah and leaders of the BN parties with a deservedly thunderous slap on their faces for their immense conceit, incompetence, corruption, racism and the democratic deficit, including BN's decades' long rule-by-law governance.

The incoming new state governments and the expanded federal opposition must unify and combine all of their resources to singularly confront a seriously weakened BN-led by an inherently weak and weakened Abdullah.

No doubt on the day after the election, the outgoing BN-led state governments will have worked overtime to bury their dirty deeds, shredding indictable documents. The BN government, including incumbent ministers and previous ministers, senior bureaucrats and business cronies, must be exposed for their corruption and vigorously pursued through the courts.

Concomitantly, the hugely bastardised federal constitution must be changed, for once, to genuinely reflect the people's political aspirations. Forcing the BN government to hold a national referendum on the constitution must be amongst the first steps for the new opposition.

This should be swiftly followed by changes within Malaysia's judiciary, starting with the High Court. If Malaysia wants to avoid the kind of actions pursued by the stunning stupidity of Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf, the Malaysian Bar Council must be allowed to play a central role in reforming the Malaysian judiciary and the federal constitution.

More, the ISA, the BN's tool to repress genuine political dissent, must be repealed without question, followed speedily by the repealing of the the Sedition Act, the Printing Presses and Publications Act, the wholly racist New Economic Policy and all other laws that have allowed the ruling regime to gutlessly employ state terrorism against its citizens.

No longer must Malaysians live in fear of government, amidst a pervasive culture of abuse, lies and deception. Rather, government must live in fear of its public. The new state governments and the expanded federal opposition must not become complacent like the BN. They must not fall into BN-like rut. They must not be seduced by the spoils of political power lest they want the same fate as BN's to befall them.

The people have spoken, and they'll speak and march again en masse. Nevertheless, time will tell if this election rout of the BN is a new or false dawn for Malaysia.