

**Can BN reinvent itself?**  
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**Oon Yeoh**

analysis MCPX The 2008 general elections has left the Barisan Nasional coalition impotent in carrying through a number of key policy decisions and has inadvertently placed it between a rock and a hard place.

One of the reasons, ostensibly, for holding the elections in March rather than later was that the government could not hold off raising fuel prices for much longer. With Saturday's political tsunami, where the opposition successfully hammered the government on bread-and butter-issues, there is no way the BN can raise prices now.

abdullah ahmad badawi and barisan nasional bn manifesto election 2008 Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's ability to carry on with his various corridor plans are also in jeopardy, especially the Northern Corridor, given that Penang, Perak and Kedah are now in opposition hands. At the very least, it will be difficult for him to implement it.

The smart thing for Abdullah to do is to create a brand new cabinet, something he should have done when he got a massive mandate in 2004. Now, more than ever, he must do away with the old and usher in the new.

But it's highly unlikely he'll be replacing any old ministers who managed to retain their seats. There will be some new faces, if only because some ministers lost their seats, but we are probably not looking at a brand new cabinet.

The non-Malay component parties are in tatters. Yet they too cannot reinvent themselves. S Samy Vellu is set on staying put as president of MIC. It's hard to imagine anything he can do to convince Indian Malaysians that MIC represents them.

The decision by the new Penang and Perak state governments to have an Indian as deputy chief minister and deputy menteri besar respectively, cements DAP's and PKR's credibility as parties that take the Indian community's welfare seriously.

MCA and Gerakan both lost Chinese support in a big way. In the case of Penang, they were wiped out with DAP winning all state and federal seats. While both parties are talking about rebuilding, what you will get is pretty much the same old, same old.

Ong Ka Ting is still the president of MCA and his brother Ong Ka Chuan is still harping on how DAP is working with PAS in Perak. The canard that a vote for DAP is a vote for PAS didn't work before the elections yet the MCA secretary-general is still singing the same tired tune after the elections.

Koh Tsu Koon had the decency to offer to resign as acting president of Gerakan, although true to form, its members rejected this. To Gerakan's credit, party adviser Lim Keng Yaik has said what needs to be said.

"The advice given to him (Abdullah) has been wrong," he said. "If his advisers have been giving the wrong advice, remove them all."

## **Minister post for Khairy?**

And we all know who Abdullah's advisor-in-chief is.

umno 2007 khairy jamaluddin pemuda and putera umno 051107Speaking of the country's most powerful 32-year-old, Khairy Jamaluddin's election to Parliament has placed his embattled father-in-law in a fix. By convention, as Umno deputy Youth chief, he should get a deputy minister post. But how can Abdullah make him a deputy minister after all the flak he's been getting for listening too much to Khairy.

PKR de factor leader Anwar Ibrahim has denounced the New Economic Policy as a flawed policy and calls for a new Malaysian deal that helps the needy regardless of race. This view has been echoed by the new Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim. Even PAS has agreed that NEP needs reforms. Can Umno say the same thing?

Both Khalid and his Penang counterpart, Lim Guan Eng, have also said they want a Freedom of Information Act, local council elections and open tenders for state projects. Will the BN offer any of these things in the states it controls?

In short, the opposition can offer – and in some cases, actually implement – many of the things that BN simply won't or can't offer, much less implement.

The big headache for BN is that the public is clearly sick of its tired system and for the first time in 50 years, expressed its discontent through the polls on Saturday.

Abdullah and a whole assortment of BN leaders have been saying they hear the voters loud and clear. They say they need to do some soul searching. But nothing we've heard so far indicates they are willing or even capable to making the changes – which have to be drastic in order to be meaningful – that the public is demanding.

BN's culture of Umno political hegemony and the subservience of other component parties, as well as deeply-entrenched personal interests by various factions, simply doesn't make it possible for BN to change.

If we have four or five more years of the same thing, after the next general elections, when people talk about the opposition, it could very well be the BN they are referring to.

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