

Panelist : demise of racial politics brings joy
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The biggest indicator of last Saturday's election results which should make many happy is the beginning of the demise of racial politics in this country, said Dr Toh Kin Woon, a former Gerakan Penang executive councillor. MCPX

"Saturday was a historic day. It changed the nation's political landscape and I think Malaysians welcome this change," he told a post-election forum at the Chinese Assembly Hall in Kuala Lumpur last night.

election 2008 forum 130208 speakersIn the March 8 polls, the opposition won Penang, Kedah, Perak, Selangor and managed to retain Kelantan. BN was also denied a two-third majority in Parliament for the first time since 1969.

Toh believed that, among other implications, the results was a clear indication that racial barriers in voting trend had been transcended, referring to the results in mixed constituencies as evidence.

"In these seats, we often see Malay voters become the decisive factor and they would usually opt for BN but this has changed. Now the Malay voters have no problem voting for candidates from other races," he said.

Can't cope with living costs

Elaborating on this new trend, another panelist Ibrahim Suffian who is executive director of Merdeka Centre said the Malay swing can be attributed to one major factor.

"Fuel price hike and the consequential hike in the prices of basic commodities is a big factor that contributed to Malay dissatisfaction with the BN government," commented Ibrahim.

It is important to note, said Ibrahim, that the Malays are actually satisfied with BN's performance in a lot of aspects like religion and education but these came second to the government's inability to address the price hike issue.

"Even the Chinese are satisfied with certain aspects of BN's work like preservation of culture and quality of education but were definitely dissatisfied with the price hikes," he commented.

Although a government research showed that many profess the ability to cope with the drastic change in the cost of living, Ibrahim's research indicated totally the opposite.

"Our extensive research shows that almost 80 percent of the population find it hard to cope with the high cost of living and blamed the government for it," he said.

It is altogether a different story with the Indians, stressed Ibrahim. His study showed that the Indians were very dissatisfied with the racial discrimination practiced against them.

Mainstream media's blunder

Third panelist Kadir Jasin, a former New Straits Times chief editor, said placing the price hike issue and arrogance of BN leaders next to each other, the results would be "kemarahan rakyat" (peoples anger).

"The people are definitely angered by the arrogance of BN leaders. The real statistics are concealed by the mainstream media and the leaders are out of touch from the reality.

"In the end, they believed their own lies," he said.

Kadir said when Pak Lah told the people to change their lifestyle to cope with the rising prices, the people's fury ascended.

"Because when they look at their leaders who just told them to change their lifestyle living the luxurious life it didn't make sense and for the Malays, this is very sensitive," he explained.

The fact that BN leaders told the people that fuel subsidies will be further reduced also contributed to the Malay swing as they felt that their leaders were beginning to ignore the repercussions that would impact the people, said Kadir.

Price hikes were subsequently followed by street protests and what made it worst, argued Kadir, is that the mainstream media had reported BN leaders as saying that the best way to protest is to show it through the ballot box.

"And the voters did do this. So all in all, these things are reported in the mainstream media and despite the mainstream media being owned or closely linked to BN leaders, it had sabotaged its own agenda," he said.

election 2008 forum 130208 crowdKadir also said that Malaysiakini played a pivotal role in the elections providing "independent and bias-free information" and that people have more access to impartial information.

All the panelists agreed that opposition victory cannot be taken for granted and that the parties must begin to work on delivering results as soon as possible.

"I think in five to six months time, the people will begin to act as judge to the opposition parties. They must overcome their differences and start working on delivering the goods promised," Kadir said.

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