

New political sky, a new game!
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At about 7 pm on March 8, the polling day for the 12th Malaysian general election, I proceeded to my neighbourhood coffee shop in Cheras for dinner. Three neighbours at the next table were discussing the election. MCPX

I joined in and opined that the state power had fallen to DAP. This remark drew forth an explosive expression of incredulity and distaste. It was impossible, one declared with a contemptuous wave of the hand. Another went into uncontrollable rage proclaiming that if DAP took over from the BN in Penang, the state would not see development for the next five years.

I wonder how they would feel the next morning, to discover a brand new political sky, with the opposition coalition taking 82 seats in Parliament, and winning state power in four states on top of PAS' Kelantan.

The next day, on March 9, I went down to Bukit Bintang. It was business as usual, though the traffic was unusually loose for a Sunday. Perhaps KL people just stayed home to recover from their lack of sleep, since many concerned citizens in the nation's capital must have stayed up late to follow the election results on TV until the wee hours of the morning. Then again, perhaps they had the same concern as I did and refrained from getting out of their house.

It was business as usual on the most famous street in Kuala Lumpur. One car bearing a huge PKR flag fluttering in the air drove by in celebration, and that was it. The faded posters still hung morosely along the street, and looked forlorn and irrelevant overnight, like many of the tired rhetoric flung out to overflowing during the campaign.

I bumped into an old friend, whose family had supported the MCA for four or five decades. She could hardly control her joy, but whispered to me that we had better keep our happiness to ourselves. From now on, she said, we can be the real bosses of our country. I might add that this old lady is 63-years-old, and is merely semi-literate, having worked as a hawker in Jalan Alor at the time of the May 13 incident.

Faulty assumption

In 1969, though the election results shocked the nation, the opposition did not fare as well as in 2008. True, Penang had seen Gerakan emerging as the political master of Penang while in opposition. In Selangor, the number of seats won by the opposition equalled that won by the then Umno-led Alliance. It was cause enough for the infamous May 13 carnage that sullied our national soul.

Since then, the ruling coalition has never failed to remind voters before every election one way or another that if the opposition comes to power, there would be a blood bath. In the subconscious mind of the people, this faulty assumption aimed at people's unnamed fear has been cast in stone as a national myth, and has delivered defeat after defeat to the fledgling opposition parties in the past.

This time around, BN has been denied a two-third majority in parliament for the first time. Four more states have fallen to the eclectic opposition coalition, including the prosperous states of Penang and Selangor. Powerful individuals who looked like they were destined to be party presidents and cabinet ministers for life have collapsed like a house of cards. But there was not a hint of a riot. There was only a widespread aura of quiet satisfaction and a huge sigh of relief among people of various races.

I could write a thousand column articles explaining why the circumstances have changed and that an alternative government would not be cause for any social upheaval, and neither would it hamper socio-economic development in opposition-held states. I could further add that if you look at the long history of mankind, no single political force could govern for 10,000 years, and no political parties would remain in the opposition for ever. I could even cite recent examples in this region, as dictators had been kicked out from their thrones in the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, and Indonesia.

Before this election, nobody would be convinced by my analysis, least of all my above mentioned neighbours. They had believed in too many false myths for too long.

And now that alternative governments are possible, at least at the state level, with the parliament falling into opposition hands in the next election becoming a real possibility, the facts speak for themselves. That is how Hegel's unseen hand of history works, often beyond the expectation and despite the subjective will to power of the main actors and their followers.

And so history is pedagogical in itself. Many myths that have been constructed to become the premises of the national narrative have been exploded and torn to smithereens by unexpected development in the last general election.

One such myth is the near mystical 'social contract' that enabled the people of different races to share power on an unequal basis under an Umno dominated government. It has been successful for half a century. In the past, under different historical parameters, this myth was not entirely useless. Then over a long time, people of various ethnic origins could not stomach the pervasive corruption, nepotism, and abuse of power for self-enrichment carried out in the name of power-sharing and national unity.

Window of opportunity

The rise of an alternative coalition suddenly offers a window of opportunity for another form of more meaningful and more inclusive ethnic relation. The state governments of Penang, Perak, Selangor, Kedah, and Kelantan can prove to the whole nation in the next five years that they can look after all citizens better than any government that is run on the race-based politics of the BN.

lim guan eng anwar ceramah penang 030308 happyFor instance, the challenge for the DAP-PKR state government in Penang is to show to the world that, even without the NEP, the Malays will be much better off under a Chinese led coalition than when they were bombarded with this NEP business under an Umno government. That will take a great deal of courage, wisdom, innovativeness, and a self liberation from ethnic enslavement on the part of the DAP. Now that they are in government, they must undergo a radical paradigm shift in their political vision more urgently than ever before.

One of the other myths being deconstructed is that BN has been given a divine mandate to

rule Malaysia. The BN has campaigned on a platform to deliver political stability and economic development. Only the BN can deliver the goods, so the saying goes.

Eventually this claim has been vetoed by Malaysians of all races at the poll. What the official media propagates is one thing. What the people from all walks of life experience in reality is quite another. They have decided to punish the government for failing to deliver the goods promised in 2004. They have put paid to the lie that only the BN can govern the country. They have subverted the credibility of the mainstream media and exposed the lies broadcast daily to the nation through the official channels of communication.

Finally, an Alexandrian Knot has been slashed assunder with one fell swoop of the vote.

The eyes of future generations will be opened forever. The Umno dominated BN does not indeed have any divine right to rule. The opposition coalition can come to power. What was deemed impossible has come to be.

From now on, it is a different ball game. The racial hysteria that has imprisoned Malaysian minds seems on the verge of dying from implosion. Politicians and the people will now have to explore new ways of thinking and talking about politics with a new language. Those dinosaurs who still insist on parroting their worn-out racial narratives are doomed to the dust-bin of Malaysian history.

There will be those eternal cynics who doubt if the opposition governments in the five states can rule better than their BN predecessors. Such doubts are reasonable. The burden is now on the new governments to deliver on their manifestoes.

If they fail, then we will have to vote them out in the next general election five years from now. But this simple possibility has turned power relation in the whole nation upside down. The people are now the real bosses running this country. Every general election from now on is the time when the people must hold job interviews. Those applying for the job of running the country on our behalf must show their resumes and their track record. On March 8, 2008, the people have been empowered overnight.

Therefore, the greatest victors in the recent general elections are neither the BN or the opposition coalition, but the people of Malaysia and the democratic future of our beloved nation. At the end of 50 years of independence, we have really achieved something historic – democracy has come of age.

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