

Issues were already 'ripe' before election
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The 'electoral tsunami' that swept over the shores of the northern peninsula showed a strong indication that the people are finally ready for a change of government. The next round of wave could see the ruling coalition losing its simple majority in parliament to the opposition. For this to happen, the opposition will need to 'educate' the people of Sabah and Sarawak about the realities of proper democracy and government. MCPX

Nevertheless, the 12th General Election is the watershed towards Malaysia's political maturity after 50 years of monopolistic governance by a single coalition. Indeed, it is the nascent political transformation of a developing country aspiring to become developed by 2020. Yet, its political development has been deliberately hampered by shallow-thinking, morally-corrupt politicians who dwell on the politics of fear, playing on racial sentiments, abusing power to stymie all forms of dissenting views and above all, showing arrogance of political hegemony despite obvious manifestation of discontent through public rallies of massive proportions.

These rallies, though deemed illegal by the partisan police, reinforced the peoples' resolve to demand immediate solutions and answers to allegations of unfair election practices, mismanagement of the economy that resulted in rising costs of living, high toll charges and overall inflation. Whilst Hindraf protested against inter alia marginalisation of the Indians, other groups rallied against rising fuel prices, interference with the judiciary, an unfettered crime rate and a general failure of the government to live up to its previous election promises to fight corruption and be transparent.

Thus, even before the dissolution of Parliament, the state of affairs within the country was such that most ordinary people on the streets were already harbouring disaffection towards the ruling coalition blaming it for the rot in the judiciary and police force and the current socio-economic problems. These issues were already 'ripe' by the time election campaigns went underway. Therefore, it did not take much persuasion by the opposition parties to convince the voters to vote for change. The voters simply had enough of BN's nonsense.

The 'Anwar Ibrahim factor' also deserves mention because he was instrumental in bringing the opposition parties together and rallied for the setting up of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on the Lingam tape controversy. The ensuing reverberations were felt along the corridors of power at Putrajaya, eroding further public confidence in the Executive and the Judiciary. Who said he was irrelevant? In fact, despite being a de facto leader of PKR, Anwar Ibrahim has proven his critics wrong - he is still a relevant force to be reckoned with. Last but not least, it is Pak Lah's ineffective laissez-faire leadership that sealed the cauldron of burning issues - and at boiling point, the resultant exploding overflow burned a lot of BN candidates.

On hindsight, the usual poster war seemed rather irrelevant and wasteful. All that was needed was some information about the candidates rather than an overdose of flags and posters along kilometers of roads, intersections and roundabouts. It goes to show that voters don't make up their minds based on the quantity or size of posters on the streets.

With the advent of the Internet, battles of persuasion were already fought and won in cyberspace, long before the general election. The people of peninsula Malaysia have always

been hungry for alternative news and views since the local media is full of subliminal propaganda and bias reporting. The policy of overbearing dominance of the local media by the government is seen as an affront to our intelligence and seems somewhat mismatched by its hypocritical push for Information Communication Technology.

Finally, it seems clear that the breakdown of votes reveals a new and welcoming political development in that the electorates' choice transcends the racial divide. This truly remarkable change is indeed a pre-requisite of a matured democracy in a developed country.

However, this Government still lacks the political courage to fight its opponents on a level playing field, for example giving equal 'air time' over the TV and radio like they do in the UK or conducting public debates like they do in the US. It should allow more frequent publication of oppositions' newspapers. It should encourage independent news from non-governmental agencies. It should broadcast live and recorded parliamentary sessions on TV for the benefit of the masses. Its strength could only be derived from the people themselves who ultimately decide who should represent them.

Conversely, it would be prudent for opposition parties to spread their wings to Sabah and Sarawak in a big way and double their efforts to woo the less-informed and 'lesser educated' people there. As long as the level of education amongst the natives there remains relatively low, they would be easily swayed by any Government propaganda or God forbid 'co-incidental financial assistance'.

It is hoped that in future, the political atmosphere will be conducive enough to make way for a true-blue matured democracy by the time we get to call ourselves a developed and civil nation.

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