

The 'political tsunami' explained
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 31, 2008
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A fortnight after the 12th general election (GE) only those in total defiance and denial could dare contest that the Barisan Nasional (BN) suffered a 'political tsunami'. MCPX

The extent of damage this tsunami caused the BN has a parallel in the 1969 GE. The Alliance only garnered 46.2 percent of the popular vote and lost Kelantan, Penang and Perak to the opposition.

In the recent elections, BN lost five states – Kelantan, Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor - and were only able to secure 48.7 percent of the popular vote, including the spoilt votes.

barisan nasional and parliamentOn both occasions, the BN was denied a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Right up to January, surveys had consistently showed that the electorate, particularly the Chinese and Indians, were bent on voting for the opposition. A month before dissolution of Parliament, both ethnic groups showed over 60 percent willingness to vote for a stronger opposition at both the state and parliamentary levels.

It is my conviction that the 'tsunami' only happened very close to polling day. It wasn't apparent after dissolution of Parliament perhaps not as even after nomination day. A 'political tsunami' has a different dynamic and a different triggering factors, but is a tsunami nonetheless. It is my reading that the final tectonic earthquakes were triggered in the midst of confusion, desperation and frustration of the public, exacerbated by the BN's media blitz that resulted in over-kill.

On March 5, the Election Commission withdrew the planned use of indelible ink. This was perceived as scandalous, including among the 'silent majority' of the electorate. They began to believe comments in the 'new media', that the BN was out to cheat and implement its evil design to regain power through phantom voters or multiple voting.

malaysia people rakyatThis was the 'epicentre' of the earthquake, resulting in the massive 'displaced water mass' that found its momentum further in the empathy by the voters as a result of the final onslaught perpetrated on the person of former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim. Their last desperate attempt to vilify him added insult to the injury sustained by the 'middle-ground voters'.

What could be more timely for the 'political tsunami' to achieve its perfection than the much-awaited 'confession of Dr Mahathir Mohamad of how much he had wronged his protégé Anwar.

This huge 'displaced water mass' of disgruntled voters finally found its equilibrium position by settling for the opposition in the hope of change and in anticipation for a dawn of a new Malaysia.

Malay swing

Based on our econometric model, on average (mean value) at parliamentary level for Peninsular Malaysia, the swing compared to 2004 GE were that the Malays experienced a 5.13 percent swing, the Chinese a huge 56.26 percent, while the Indian a whopping 69.09 percent. (Our degree of confidence is at 95 percent for all the estimates).

Little wonder that the BN component parties, namely MCA, Gerakan and the MIC, as in 1969, suffered severely and many of their leaders were obliterated.

phantom voters You may think that the Malay swing is not significant but bearing in mind the bigger base of Malay voters, in actual numbers as compared to the smaller Indian base, the outcome was equally damaging to the BN. It was a double whammy of sorts, after the Indians and Chinese acted in tandem to deny the BN their long-standing 'taken-for-granted' support.

Let me elaborate on the Malay swing for parliamentary seats in key states:

- Selangor: 59 percent of Malay voted for BN in 2004, but only 52 percent in 2008, or a swing of 11.82 percent
- Kedah: 66 percent of Malays voted for BN in 2004, and only 47 percent in 2004, or a swing of 15.84 percent
- Johor: The average Malay swing of 4.45 percent was not sufficient to translate into winning seats but was significant in extending the opposition's support base.

Why were both the Indians and Chinese willing to vote for PAS? This is arguably a tough question to answer with any degree of precision. This is again a matter of perception and I wouldn't want to sound simplistic or simplifying matters.

PAS has been doggedly investing a lot by way of resources and time to broaden our support base among the non-Muslims, while maintaining our stronghold in the Malay Belt and our traditional strongholds. We have been strategising for this since our bad outing in 2004, and it paid handsome dividends.

Change of image

PAS now fully understands the need to articulate our political ideology in language understandable by all. The Islamic state issue has plagued us negatively. In this election, we were able to further our political commitments through our manifesto entitled 'A Trustworthy, Fair and Clean Government: Towards A Nation of Care and Opportunity'.

It was well received and resonated well with friends, well-wishers and even amongst non-partisan middle-ground voters both Muslims and non-Muslims. We launched it early and took center-stage in the national media amidst much critique, immediately after Parliament was dissolved.

Our social and political engagement approach has been open and extensive. The growth of many PAS support clubs in the Chinese and Indian communities speaks volumes of the acceptance of PAS. This has been both consoling and reassuring.

We have been able to counter the negative stereotyping and bad image by engaging directly with all communities and stressing on the 'substantive approach' of embodying our Islamic

principles and teachings rather than being entangled with unending debates on semantics, our enemies would like to drag us into. We have turned our image into a more progressive Islamic party with a middle-ground appeal while not losing our traditional support.

We have also been relentless in the fight for democratic rights and against draconian rules and laws. We continue to uphold the rights of marginalised peoples of all ethnic groups and political persuasions, including the Indian community spearheaded by the Hindu Rights Action Force.

PAS has been also been in the forefront for the campaign for free and fair elections with all the well-wishers of democracy in Bersih. Our democratic credentials speak for itself for the last five decades.

pas membersWe lined up a credible mix of religiously trained leaders, professionals and party activists of both genders commendably at the parliamentary and state level. The party's think-tank had pre-empted major upsets and surprises in the mixed-seats constituencies. We have been working hard to transform our image into one that is amenable and friendly to all to leverage maximally on the trend. We now stand tall to humbly say that "PAS is for all".

When the parliamentary seats of Kota Raja in Selangor and Titiwangsa in Kuala Lumpur were won by our promising women leaders, we knew we had crossed the threshold of prejudices that we once succumbed to. Our 'inoculation strategy' in this GE has worked well for us.

Now is the time for our leadership, both at the central and state level particularly in Kelantan and Kedah and together with our component parties in the other states in the 'Government of the Rakyat', to deliver and realise our vision to serve the nation regardless of race, religions and culture in an open, fair and trustworthy-government.

This victory must be undoubtedly dedicated to all well-wishers of democracy of this renewed and reborn nation of Malaysia!

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