

'Pakatan win a devastating blow to Najib'
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Malaysia's opposition has scored a much-needed victory in a by-election which it said showed it had the momentum to dislodge the coalition that has ruled for half a century.

Analysts said that the vote in Permatang Pasir in northern Penang state proved that Anwar Ibrahim's Pakatan Rakyat opposition alliance was working together effectively despite tensions between its three disparate members.

They said it was also a blow for Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak who came to power in April with plans to claw back voter support after his Barisan Nasional coalition suffered its worst ever results in national elections last year.

"The strong and decisive victory... is a devastating blow to Najib," said veteran opposition lawmaker Lim Kit Siang after the Pakatan Rakyat retained the seat by a convincing majority in yesterday's ballot.

The opposition has now won seven of eight by-elections held since last year's national polls, in a major boost for the alliance of the Islamic party PAS, the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party, and Anwar's PKR.

The latest vote in mid-July saw the opposition suffer a sharply reduced majority, in a result the Barisan Nasional hailed as a sign its support was rebounding.

But Lim said that Tuesday's ballot showed there was still "momentum for national change set off 18 months ago by the political tsunami of the March 8 general elections".

BN's machinery is broken

Political analyst Shaharuddin Badaruddin who observed the vote in Permatang Pasir said the result showed that Barisan Nasional's once formidable election machinery was broken.

"The success here was critical to the survival of the Pakatan Rakyat," he said. "If (the government) had managed to reduce their majority, definitely that would have been trouble for Anwar Ibrahim."

"If Pakatan Rakyat was collapsing you could see that from the vote, but its support is intact," he said. "So there is no impact from their squabbling, they have shown they can settle their problems."

Shaharuddin said the by-election also indicated that Najib's much-vaunted "1Malaysia" policy, which is aimed at winning back support from minority ethnic Chinese and Indians, has not been well received.

"I don't think the people really understand what they mean by 1Malaysia," he said. Malaysia's minority communities swung towards the opposition in the 2008 national elections, which handed Anwar's alliance an unprecedented one-third of seats in parliament and control of five of 13 states.

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