

**GE-13: Red Alert For Pakatan**  
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Everyone is aware that if the opposition fails to get its act together, then the same voters who voted against BN in the 2008 general election will turn their backs on the opposition in GE-13.

The opposition made considerable gains in Sarawak on 16 April but has this encouraged complacency? Or is the opposition willing to put aside its ego and listen to the various grouses, and perhaps fine-tune its campaigning methodology.

Malaysia's most hotly contested general election is rumoured to be scheduled for September 2011. Others say that it will be done and dusted by July this year. The chances of Pakatan winning is remote if lessons are not learnt from the Sarawak campaign.

The Sarawak polls was a painful reminder that Pakatan's weaknesses can and will be exploited by BN. If Pakatan refuses to address these problems, then they can forget about their 'one-third' in parliament.

Despite the failure of 1Malaysia to grip the population, Prime Minister Najib Razak is still a popular figure among the Malays and Indians. And anyway, what choice have the rakyat got? Najib is preferable to the divisive Deputy PM Muhyiddin Yassin who proudly announced he was a 'Malay first and Malaysian second'.

Sarawak caused fracture lines within the opposition when the DAP was seen as an increasingly arrogant party. This created tension in its relationship with the other coalition partners. Will the same uneasiness be felt, before GE-13? Will Najib capitalise on Pakatan's in-fighting?

The opposition's message was to drive BN out. Somehow, it lacked focus on how it would strive for change. Without the specifics of how it intends to do this, the credibility of the opposition leaders is damaged.

This sadly, reinforces the impression that the opposition is more concerned with 'winning power' than the 'actual implementation' of the promises made.

So will the opposition overstretch itself again? In Sarawak, the opposition spreaded itself too thin because it tried to contest in as many seats as was possible. Will the same be repeated in GE-13?

Pakatan won Ba'Kelalan in Sarawak because of local knowledge and experience. Will the opposition capitalise on this method, to succeed in the peninsula?

Over in Sabah, painful lessons have also been felt when Pakatan leaders came into the state and rode roughshod over the locals, during the party elections last year. Sabahans were quick to label the "orang semenanjung" of the opposition, as arrogant. The opposition leaders failed to address local concerns, and thus alienated the Sabahans.

The states of Sabah and Sarawak are crucial vote-banks, but will the opposition leaders accept that the locals know their territory best. Will the semenanjung people relinquish their hold and leave it to the locals to decide what is best? Will the peninsula leaders be willing to

empower Sabahans and Sarawakians to address local concerns?

Come GE-13, Pakatan knows it cannot dedicate as much manpower, and with its limited resources, to run an effective campaign as in Sarawak.

As before, it is the people's expectations that will prove critical. Ever since the last general election, the expectations have been extremely high. And they were disappointed when many of the promises made by the opposition were broken.

They expressed incredulity when Pakatan maintained that certain changes could not be effected. Those who voted them in, saw these 'explanations' as mere excuses.

Change may not occur overnight but why, asked the detractors, did the Pakatan government of Perak which ruled for 11 months give titles for state land, to the Malays and Chinese but ignored the Indians? It is hard to believe that the Indians did not make a similar request.

In the Selangor Pakatan government, several hectares of land for non-Muslim religious shrines had been allocated and despite more Hindu temples being torn-down or relocated, the majority of the land was given to the Chinese whilst the Hindus received only a small percentage of this.

Thus, to the voters, both BN and Pakatan leaders continue to pay lip service to Malaysians instead of addressing their genuine concerns, and keeping their election promises.

In addition to that, many Pakatan supporters are wary that its leaders have too much baggage as most are derived from the Umno-fold. Despite the protestations of these leaders that their cause lies with Pakatan, many party supporters remain suspicious of them.

The coming general election will be a pivotal moment. There is widespread unhappiness with BN's policies such as its economic, immigration and labour policies and Malaysians are extremely frustrated. Their deep-seated anxieties, angst and anger are rising. They are angry with the corruptions and abuses of power.

The hard reality is that voters will wonder if the opposition can deliver. They are concerned that insufficient headway has been made in the rural areas.

After the high-scale electoral fraud in Sarawak, the opposition must show what it intends to do, to prevent votes going astray in GE-13. What remedial steps will they take, bearing in mind that BN will ignore their protestations? Will the opposition seek help from international observers to ensure a free and fair election?

This nation has become more polarised since March 2008. At that time BN was complacent. However, this time round, BN has the advantage and it is determined not to lose.

Is the opposition a credible force and can it put up a formidable fighting force? Or will it be too cocky and think that the rakyat's frustrations with BN is enough to translate into votes for the opposition?

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