

# Winds of change sweep M'sia

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## Initial results stun Barisan Nasional leaders as voters send a strong message

**T**HE first sign of a massive setback for the Barisan Nasional came at around 6pm. Incumbent Lembah Pantai MP Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil sent an SMS to say that she was going to lose her seat to her Parti Keadilan Rakyat challenger Nurul Izzah Anwar.

The ballots that were coming in did not look good.

The Women, Family and Community Development Minister said she had tried her best but gave an assurance that she was calm.

From Penang, my colleagues sent messages that Gerakan acting president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon was trailing newcomer Dr P. Ramasamy in the Batu Kawan parliamentary seat.

The Gerakan, MCA and MIC were all wiped out, they said.

It became clear by 9pm that the Opposition had snatched the state from the Barisan, sending shockwaves throughout the country as Malaysians braced for more shocks.

In Sungai Siput, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu put on a brave front as feedback came from his supporters that he had lost his



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parliamentary seat.

He told them he was going home for a bath and did not return.

In the words of many politicians, it was a political tsunami.

There was more, Kedah also fell to the Opposition, then Selangor and Perak.

The wounds inflicted by the Opposition were easily the worst for the Barisan.

Even in 1969, the then Alliance only lost Penang and Kelantan.

In Penang, the then opposition Gerakan, together with DAP and Parti Rakyat, won 20 seats against the Alliance's four.

In Kelantan, PAS had 19 and the Alliance 19.

The People's Progressive Party could have formed the state govern-

ment if it had decided to forge a coalition with Gerakan, PAS and the DAP but the PPP refused.

The PPP was just two seats short of forming the government but it refused to work with Gerakan, DAP and PAS.

Even in that onslaught, Kedah remained safely in the hands of the Alliance with 14 seats against PAS' eight and Gerakan's two.

Last night's results stunned Barisan leaders and the media.

They expected the winds of change to come to Penang and Kedah but they missed out on Selangor, certainly the jewel in the crown for the Opposition this time around.

Barisan had focused its attention on the anti-establishment sentiments of the non-Malays but overlooked the mood of the Malay voters in some states.

There was even a sense of denial in some ways.

For Barisan, they had expected some dents in the predominantly Chinese areas and a serious challenge from PAS in the east coast states but certainly not in Selangor

and Perak.

While the non-Malays had their share of unhappiness, there were issues that cut across all races such as the cost of living, corruption, mismanagement and security.

At the grassroots level, there were perceptions that Barisan, following the massive win in the 2004 polls, had become too strong and that there was a need for a strong check and balance.

In 2004, the Barisan had 198 seats against 21 for the Opposition.

The voters, especially those in the urban areas, obviously wanted to send a strong message to the leadership.

They wanted their MPs to be more humble and certainly more careful with their choice of words, whether at their party assemblies or in Parliament.

But there is a big mess to be cleared - new state governments will be formed in Penang, Selangor, Kedah and Perak.

As at press time, PKR secretary-general Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim is expected to be made the new Se-

langor Menteri Besar and almost likely, his predecessor Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo, the opposition leader.

In Penang, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng will likely be the new Chief Minister.

But federal-state relations will never be the same again.

With the Barisan still in control of the Federal Government, it may even review its numerous projects in states lost to the Opposition.

As the most industrialised state in Malaysia, Selangor will be affected in many ways.

At local government level, there will be massive changes as politically-appointed councillors will have to make way.

At 12.30am, the Barisan had secured a simple majority to form the government although there were neck-and-neck races in many seats.

At the end of the day, however, the clear winner was the democratic system in Malaysia.

Despite claims to the contrary, the 12th general election proved that democracy was very much alive in the country.