

# Malaysia's three-legged stool

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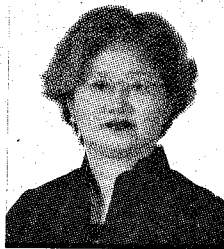
WHEN Malaysians cast their ballots in the 12th general election on March 8, there isn't any doubt about the outcome – the ruling coalition, the Barisan Nasional (BN), will form the Federal Government. Throughout the 13-day campaign period, one issue has taken centre stage: can opposition parties fulfil their objective of denying BN its two-thirds majority in Parliament?

This objective has eluded the opposition parties since 1969, the first and only time this has happened in Peninsular Malaysia. In that outing, the BN's predecessor, the Alliance, won 66 out of 103 seats in the peninsula. Buttressed by support from East Malaysian political parties, the Alliance's two-third majority would have remained intact.

Opposition parties' confidence that they can deny BN its two-third majority suggests their alleged electoral constraints – lack of significant coverage in the print and electronic media and frequent rejections of their applications to hold rallies – are minor irritants rather than major impediments.

Analysis of past voting trends and the composition of the 222 parliamentary seats underscore the monumental challenge the opposition parties face in attempting to win the 75 federal constituencies needed to deny BN a two-thirds majority.

This is because constituencies



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in Malaysia are like a three-legged stool – comprising of Malay-majority seats, non-Malay majority seats as well as seats in Sabah and Sarawak. Denying the BN a two-thirds majority will require breaking two of the three legs.

Out of 222 Parliamentary seats up for grabs in this poll, 115 or 51.8% are

Malay-majority seats, 50 seats or 22.5% are non-Malay majority seats while the remaining 57 seats or 25.7% comprise seats in Sabah and Sarawak. (see table)

Even in the worst case scenario – the BN loses all 50 non-Malay majority seats and 10 Malay-majority seats – the ruling coalition will still secure 162 seats, sufficient to maintain its two-thirds majority. This three-legged stool is the BN's biggest strength.

If voting conforms to historical trends, the chances of the opposition achieving its long-cherished goal are bleak.

Both Sabah and

