

A changed Malaysia come May 6
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COMMENT, May 4 — No matter which coalition makes the government in the early morning of May 6, one thing is certain — Malaysia has changed and it is business unusual for the new administration.

With the respected Merdeka Center for Opinion Research's latest survey showing a dead heat between both Barisan Nasional (BN) or Pakatan Rakyat (PR), the winner's first job is to respond to a populace that questions and demands more from its government.

Forget the docile and subservient citizenry that thought government always knew best. That worked for some 55 years but this is a new Malaysia where the people are more advanced and ambitious in thought than their politicians.

A population where pensioners and the bloated civil service are no longer a sure vote bank, where racial barriers have collapsed and people are one as Bangsa Malaysia — concerned more about the economy than the personal lives of politicians.

This single-mindedness and unity comes despite the overt racist tones in the campaign since Nomination Day on April 20 or the fear-mongering being played out by certain political parties.

The results of the latest Merdeka Center poll — 42 per cent of the voters agreeing that PR could govern the country against 41 per cent who felt only BN should rule Malaysia — reflect how far the country has come from elections where politicians just pleaded to be a strong opposition.

“Change happens all the time and in the same way that none of us can ever imagine Malaysia regressing to an age where women are not allowed access to education, we cannot ever imagine going back to a politics that is simplistic, patronising, top-down and unchallenged.

“Even the former opposition parties have learned, over the past five years, what it is really like to be in power and having to be accountable to NGOs and public opinion. It's been a learning experience for all of us, and I believe we have grown a little wiser too,” well-known academic Dr Farish A. Noor wrote in an essay today.

That wisdom has meant that no government can now simply implement a top-down decision without being questioned by the people or told in no uncertain terms how unpopular some ideas are.

Ideas are being shared and shaped through the Internet, people, young and old, are coming together and ahead of politicians whose mindsets belong to the trunks of their forefathers

who travelled in the previous century.

The old must make way for the new, just like party-owned newspapers that will be held accountable for their reportage. The days of being the only source of credible news is over for the likes of the New Straits Times, The Star, Berita Harian or Utusan Malaysia.

There is now a proliferation of news portals and growing rise of video clips that tell a story better and faster than any propagandist can. The new media has become the standard way of creating and consuming news and information, leaving in its wake shrinking audiences for newspapers and state broadcasters that refuse to step into the 21st century.

Why? Because there are more young people now than ever before. More of who want a say in their country Malaysia. More who will come to vote tomorrow as eagerly as those Malaysians abroad last Sunday.

We have changed as Malaysians. We are no longer bystanders and an audience of a national narrative written by politicians. We are the active participants shaping Malaysia's direction and discourse, looking askance at politicians who think nothing of shifting thousands of voters across the country before the polls.

This is the new Malaysia that will vote tomorrow for a better Malaysia for all who proudly call themselves Malaysians. The Malaysia that keeps its government on its toes for fear of losing its job.

This May 6 the new government will be one that learns more from the people than it can teach the people unlike the past 55 years.

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