

Message from voters to BN — race card brings dwindling returns
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MAY 9 — As if offended by all the post-election Chinese-bashing, a truly Malaysian crowd turned out last night at a stadium in Petaling Jaya to send a chilling message to the Barisan Nasional (BN) government.

The message was many ordinary Malaysians wanted an end to the race debate surrounding Sunday's vote in Election 2013.

Instead of election fatigue many voters were galvanised by what they saw as unfair and dishonest polls as well as an attempt by BN to blame the Chinese.

Those who attended last night's rally did not care about the police calling the gathering illegal.

And not all were loyal supporters of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, or card-carrying members of the three Pakatan Rakyat (PR) parties.

Chances are of course that they voted for PR parties.

But there were many young Malaysians and it was multiracial in nature.

This should serve as a warning to politicians that playing the race card is a strategy of diminishing returns.

An analysis of the votes has clearly shown that the votes for both BN and PR cut across racial lines.

If anything, analysts have said that an urban-rural divide had emerged, rather than any Malay-vs-Chinese trend.

The new reality is that PR parties now enjoy broad backing, with a bias from urban voters.

The opposition pact won the popular vote, securing just over 50 per cent of the popular votes on an anti-corruption platform while also pledging to focus less on race in wealth distribution.

BN won around 47 per cent of the vote but still emerged victorious, with strong backing from rural voters as well as from the less-developed areas of Sabah and Sarawak.

For the tens of thousands who packed the MBPJ Stadium last night and for all Malaysians, both BN and PR will have to work hard to win over more votes.

BN and Umno have made the job much tougher by blaming the Chinese for voting against a "Malay" government as has been argued by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his allies in Utusan Malaysia.

The narrative of Umno's right-wing has so far has been predictable, and many Malaysians are finding it insulting.

From words like “Chinese tsunami” to headlines like “Apa lagi Cina mahu? (What more do the Chinese want?)”, Umno is only succeeding in entrenching whatever support PR parties already have.

Perhaps BN should be reminded that it won power on Sunday, notwithstanding the allegations of fraud.

Instead of looking for a bogeyman in Anwar or the Chinese voter, BN will be well-advised to listen.

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