

The changing fortunes of GE13's main players
Malaysian Insider
May 4, 2014

In our continuing series to mark the first anniversary of the most heated general election in recent memory, The Malaysian Insider reviews the fortunes of some of the main political players.

The aftermath of election 2013 is still being felt a year after Malaysians turned up in full force to vote either the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) or the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) to Putrajaya.

BN won 133 federal seats in the May 5 polls, seven less than in 2004. PR won 89 seats but lost one more state, Kedah, in the general elections which saw the opposition pact take more of the popular vote.

The Malaysian Insider today looks at the fortunes of the main political players 12 months after the general election – a contest which confirmed BN's loosening grip on the electorate.

*** Datuk Seri Najib Razak**

Even his most ardent supporter has to concede that for many months after May 5, it was touch and go for the Prime Minister.

A combination of leading BN to worst ever electoral results, months of being in self-induced coma, push back from instigator-in-chief Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the fallout from the rising cost of living seemed to spell an early exit for Najib, much like his predecessor Tun Abdullah Badawi following the 2008 elections.

At one stage, his approval rating was below 50%. But he has survived, by default. Or more accurately, by the unwillingness of either Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin or Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi to step up to the plate and challenge Najib.

So he remains in power but is hardly prime ministerial. He wears the pallor of someone who carries the weight of the world on his shoulders or have a cupboard stacked with skeletons.

The next few months will be critical and his main job will be to alleviate the biting rising cost of living for millions of Malaysians and yet show investors that he is committed to reducing the budget deficit.

And at the same, keep rising extremism and chauvinism in check. Any wonder that he looks defeated on most days.

*** Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim**

He is going away for a long time. Four years in jail just will not do. Why? With good behaviour, the top leader of PR and BN's nemesis will be out in time to become the face of the opposition at the next polls, scheduled for 2018.

So his jail term is being appealed and the odds are that Malaysia's most famous opposition politician and the person that unifies PR will receive a stiffer jail sentence.

It has been a tough 12 months for Anwar. PR looks more and more like a loose pact rather than a single-minded coalition, push and pulled in different directions over PAS's insistence on pushing the hudud agenda.

But truth be told, even before the divisive issue of hudud was the messy move to replace Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim as the Menteri Besar of Selangor.

Critics argue that Anwar's absence will hasten the implosion of PR and could even weaken PKR. That is the conventional view.

On the flip side, perhaps without the Anwar crutch, younger DAP, PKR and PAS leaders will be forced to grow up, step up and lead the charge.

*** Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang**

He is the president of Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) and that is about it.

PAS loyalists may believe that their leader should have a shot at being Prime Minister but the simple fact is this: he has neither the gravitas, the ideas or dynamism to be anything more than a leader of a political party.

There is a reason why the Hadi-led PAS government of Terengganu lasted only one term: it was devoid of any ideas.

For months after May 5, PAS has been listless, drifting as the progressives in the party tried to fend off attacks by the religious class. Has it even performed a post-mortem on its election performance?

Does Hadi have an economic vision for Malaysia? Or does everything begin and end with hudud?

*** Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad**

For all his bombast and his continuing love affair with making headlines, the former prime minister has seen his influence wane.

Yes, Najib meets him occasionally for longish sessions, listens to his grouses from everything from BR1M handouts to the government's addiction to consultants but Dr Mahathir has failed to shake Najib.

Neither Muhyiddin nor Zahid is interested in helping Dr Mahathir lead a charge against Najib.

Without one of the key Umno figures interested in playing the role of challenger and buying into his "political succession" plan, Dr Mahathir's attacks against the sitting PM is akin to having a gun with empty chambers: nice to look at but really quite useless.

*** Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin**

Has said little of value in the past 12 months and has done little of value.

Teachers have revolted against the assessment-based education, Malaysian students have performed abysmally in several international studies and local universities are so far off pace internationally that it is shameful.

But Muhyiddin struts about while declaring that the country's education system is world class. Growing speculation that he could step down as the DPM. The good news: his absence will be hardly felt.

*** Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein**

Sad but true. If not for the profile afforded to him by the MH370 incident, he would have been just another member of the Malaysian cabinet. Largely anonymous. Largely ineffective.

His inner circle (aides, consultants and supporters) believe that his performance as the face of the government's response to the missing aircraft has spiked his popularity and puts him as the front runner as a future DPM.

But they forget that he barely won the third spot as the party 's vice-president and Umno members do not vote someone in on the basis of his appearance on CNN.

*** Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai/Datuk Seri G. Palanivel**

Inconsequential. Liow is one lucky man and he should thank his old friend, Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek, for saying that the MCA would refuse government positions as a result of its poor performance in GE13. If not, he would have been in the eye of the MH370 storm.

Could he have handled the international scrutiny as the Transport Minister?

Unlikely. Is his party in a stronger position today than it was during the Soi Lek era? No.

Palanivel. Inconsequential. And ineffective as a minister.

MIC has lost more ground under him than during the time of his predecessor, the long-serving and much-derided Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu – who lost in the 2004 general elections.

*** Lim Guan Eng**

He is both the Penang Chief Minister and the DAP secretary-general and there are days when one does not know which hat he wears.

Lim has grown into his role as the chief minister but is still grappling with the demands of balancing the interests of party veterans and the group of young and educated idealists wanting change beyond just a Malaysian Malaysia.

The party's state chapters appear to be run like franchises with senior leaders still wanting to remain in power on issues of vernacular education and egalitarian principles but facing the risk of being upstaged by young technocrats talking about the economy and the environment.

Lim also has to balance his party's ideals with that of coalition partners PKR and PAS, knowing full well that despite a well-organised machinery that swept more seats in GE13 – the DAP will always play second fiddle to a Malay-based party especially with its stand on a secular state. – May 4, 2014.

Hakcipta © 2013 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/the-changing-fortunes-of-ge13s-main-players>