

A Closer Look at the “Malay Tsunami”

PRU 14 is a watershed event in the evolution of Malaysia. It has opened a new chapter for the country and the potential for renewal, rejuvenation of our institutions and for building a more harmonious and fair society are immense. The Pakatan Harapan parties and the rakyat who supported the PH should be congratulated and they deserve our support at this crucial juncture in our nation’s history.

However, we must be careful not to be carried away by the euphoria of the moment and blithely claim that Malaysia has moved away from race-based politics, and imagine that the Pakatan Harapan has the support of the overwhelming majority of the population. While it is true that Malay support for the BN dropped significantly in PRU 14, in some parts of the country, the shift was to PAS and not to the PH. We need to take cognizance of this, determine the extent of this and its underlying determinants and over the next 5 years take steps to win over those traditional BN supporters who could not bring themselves to vote PH but voted PAS instead.

Let me share with you the voting data from Sg Siput that highlights this phenomenon. Sg Siput has several polling centres in the rural areas with more than 98% Malay voters. The results from several of these areas are given below

Kampung	PSM	BN	PKR	PAS	Total
Kg Kandang Hulu 707/0/0/1 ¹	2	273 (48.6%)	94 (16.7%)	193 (34.3%)	562
Kg Batang Kulim 997/3/2/2	1	169 (60.6%)	31 (11.1%)	78 (27.9%)	279
	4 ²	164 (32.4%)	82 (16.2%)	256 (50.6%)	506
Kg Jawang 707/1/1/2	2	159 (54.2%)	36 (12.3%)	95 (32.5%)	292
Kg Termin 1435/2/1/2	1	191 (67.5%)	28 (9.9%)	63 (22.3%)	283
	4	249 (54.2%)	67 (14.6%)	139 (30.3%)	459
	1	230 (54.4%)	64 (15.1%)	128 (30.3%)	423
Sg Pelus 1087/2/3/3	0	164 (56.6%)	35 (12.1%)	91 (31.4%)	290
	3	220 (37.9%)	94 (16.2%)	263 (45.3%)	580
Kg Makmur 1092/3/3/0	4	183 (60%)	31 (10.2%)	87 (28.5%)	305
	1	138 (46.3%)	52 (17.4%)	108 (36.2%)	298
Felda Lasah 1798/9/25/5	1	211 (77.8%)	19 (7%)	40 (14.7%)	271
	2	240 (58.5%)	67 (16.3%)	101 (24.6%)	410
	1	204 (54.3%)	66 (17.6%)	105 (27.9%)	376

Total		2,795 (52.4%)	766(14.4%)	1,747(32.7%)	5,335
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Notes: 1. Malay/Chinese/Indian/ Others

Others = East Malaysia Bumiputra and Orang Asli

2. Kg Batang Kulim had 2 streams, while Temin and Felda had 3 voting streams.

The data from the 7 polling stations listed above shows 52.4% of the voters in these polling centres voted for BN, 32.7% voted PAS while only 14.4% voted PKR. There was considerable variation in the figures. The support for BN was the highest in the first stream of the Felda Polling Centre – 77.8%, and lowest (33.4%) in the second stream in Batang Kulim. The tendency for younger voters to support non BN parties can also be seen in other centres that had more than 1 stream of voters.

The polling data that I have from previous years for the same polling centres helps us round up the picture –

Area	PRU 12	PRU 13	PRU 14			PRU 14
	PKR	PKR	PKR	PAS	PSM	Total non BN vote
SJKC Lasah	27.9%	25.1%	10%	30.4%	1%	41.4%
Trosor (Sg Pelus)	33.7%	23.4%	14.8%	40.6%	0.3%	55.7%
Kg Jawang	47.6%	38.0%	12.3%	32.5%	0.7%	45.5%
Kota Lama Kanan (Kg Kandang Hulu and Batang Kulim)	43.2%	38.0%	15.2%	38.8%	0.5%	54.5%

There appears to be a significant erosion of support from BN-UMNO. Roughly a quarter of the voters who voted BN in 2013 have switched over to opposition parties – and I suppose this can be termed a “tsunami”. But we need to temper this observation with the facts that UMNO still got about 52% of the rural Malay vote in Sg Siput and PAS garnered 3 quarters of the non BN vote.

This distribution of votes may not be the same situation in rural areas in Selangor and in the southern states of the Peninsula, but I suspect would be mirrored in other rural areas in Perak and other northern states.

Why are these observations important? For 2 reasons I think.

First, they seem to indicate that the rural Malay population (in some areas at least) do not quite trust the Pakatan Government to look after their interests. They might be worried that some of the programs that are benefiting them and their families might be reduced under Pakatan rule. It is important

therefore to reach out to these communities, find out their concerns and make sure that they are also beneficiaries of Pakatan Harapan's stated aim to improve the lives of the B40 in this nation. This might require tweaking of existing programs or perhaps even new programs that address their economic problems. The fact that the support among Malays for the PH in Selangor is much higher than in Perak indicates that programs undertaken by the Selangor government that targeted the B40 were appreciated and they did win over the political support of this group.

The second reason is that we need to take full cognizance of the fact that PAS received the votes of almost a third of the rural voters in Sg Siput (and probably in the rest of Perak and Kedah). We will be making a big mistake if we dismiss this as just a protest vote against a corrupt UMNO. I would take it as another indicator that Islam is an important component of the identity of Malays. It would be a mistake if PH gives the impression that it is not interested in developing Islam and Islamic institutions. That would just create the avenues for opposition parties to exploit the issue with negative consequences for the nation.

There are differing views among Muslims in Malaysia on what Muslims should be working towards. You just have to compare YB DS Hadi's approach to the Maqassid Syariah approach of IKRAM and Amanah. Non Muslims have to appreciate the importance of the ideological battle that has to be undertaken by progressive Muslims who believe that their religion is about inclusiveness, about handling diversity humanely and above all, in social justice. If progressive Muslims are hampered from engaging in this ideological battle, we run the risk of allowing a rules-bound, punitive and intolerant version of Islam to become dominant.

So, yes, the PH and its supporters have achieved a monumental change in the political landscape of the country and in so doing have unleashed great potential for moving this nation forward. But we have to be objective, take stock of the existing situation and recognize that past 70 years have segregated us ethnically. Many of us still live in our silos. We need to rise to the occasion, reach out to and understand the "other" – what they hold as important, and what their apprehensions are – so that we can build a truly inclusive and harmonious Malaysia.

Jeyakumar Devaraj
Parti Sosialis Malaysia