

Prospects of Change in PRU 14.

There is wide-spread disaffection with the Barisan Nasional. In PRU 13 the strong support for BN in the rural seats in the Peninsula and in East Malaysia helped the BN hold on to power. Today, rural Malay support for BN is dropping. The rural population is quite fed-up with rising prices, the GST, the high level of corruption in the Government, the luxurious life style of UMNO leaders and the ongoing 1MDB scandal. However because of the split of the opposition coalition, BN will probably do better in the coming elections than it did in PRU 13.

The PAS factor

PAS stood in 62 Parliament seats in West Malaysia in PRU 13 and won in 22 of these. See Table One for a breakdown of PAS' performance in Parliament seats with more than 50% Malay voters.

UMNO v/s PAS in Malay Majority Parliamentary seats in Semenanjung Malaysia

Percentage of Malay voters	> 90%	81 – 90%	71 – 80%	61 – 70%	51 – 60%
Perlis		3:0			
Kedah	3:0 ^a	3:0	1:1		
Kelantan	2:8 ^b	0:1			
Trengganu	2:4	0:1			
Penang			2:0		
Perak	1:0	2:0		3:2	
Pahang		4:0	1:0	0:1	
Selangor			1:0	2:1	0:2
Fed Territory	1:0			1:0	
N Sembilan			1:0	1:0	1:0
Melaka		1:0		1:0	1:0
Johor		1:0	3:0	1:0	0:3

a. Umno defeated PAS in three of the Parliamentary seats in Kedah that had more than 90% Malays majority.

b. PAS defeated UMNO in 8 out of the 10 seats in Kelantan in which Malays make up more than 90% of the voters.

The fact that PAS did not win any of the seats with more than 80% Malay majority in Kedah is clear evidence Malay support for PAS must be below 50% in rural Kedah. Support for PAS among rural Malays was even lower in Penang and Johor. PAS victories in the West Coast states was dependent on a huge swing of non Malay support for PAS as it was a member of the Pakatan Rakyat at that time. The figures indicate that PAS only managed to get support from more than 50% of Malay voters in some constituencies in Kelantan and Trengganu. It is unlikely that PAS is going to get much support from non Malays in PRU 14. Without non Malay support, PAS is going to suffer losses in 10 to 12 parliamentary seats that it won in PRU 13, even if there are no 3 corner fights in the seats it contests.

Many of the seats that PAS won in the West Coast States could be won in a one-to-one contest between UMNO and either PKR, Amanah or Bersatu as these three parties would be able to appeal to both Malays and non Malays disgruntled with BN. But at this point in time it appears unlikely that PAS is going to step down from any of these seats to give other opposition parties the chance to take on UMNO one on one.

The PKR

In PRU 13, the PKR stood in 47 parliamentary constituencies in Semenanjung Malaysia where more than 50% of the voters were Malay. The Table below shows its performance.

PKR Performance in Malay Majority Parliament Seats

% of Malay voters	>90%	81 – 90%	71 – 80%	61 – 70%	51 – 60%
BN won	5	4	5	9	7
PKR won	0	0	3	4	10

PKR did win 17 out of the 47 Malay majority seats that it contested. But this fact masks the reality that PKR does not have an effective electoral machinery in the rural areas. It is quite dependent on PAS for the rural Malay vote. If DS Hadi gives an order that PAS should not work with any other Party unless approved by PAS central command (and this is quite probable), then PKR will be quite hamstrung and will have to struggle to get the rural votes. But given the high level of rural Malay voter disaffection with BN, PKR might still manage to increase its tally of parliamentary seats if 3 corner battles with PAS can be avoided.

This fact is understood by the PKR faction aligned to Azmin Ali and they are trying to keep PAS as a “friend”. However the PKR faction around Rafizi has a different position – they believe that support for PAS is dropping, and that PKR and Amanah can win in 3-corner electoral contests in many rural seats. (Several DAP leaders also support this position.) This faction, and several Amanah leaders notably Khalid Samad, therefore take a rather abrasive stance towards PAS, and they are open to putting up candidates against PAS in some of the seats that PAS contested in PRU 13. That is likely to trigger a tit-for-tat situation where PAS puts up candidates against PKR candidates in seats that PKR contested in PRU 13. That would bring smiles of relief to Najib and other senior BN leaders!

In PSM’s assessment, PAS has the solid support of between 15 to 30% of the rural Malay vote. That fact, combined with the fact that neither PKR nor Amanah have developed an electoral machinery in the rural areas, means that it would be suicidal for PKR and Amanah to attempt to take on PAS in 3 – corner fights.

Prospects for Sabah

Here, there is good news for the opposition. Shafie Apdal is an intelligent and shrewd politician who quite popular in his home State. He speaks eloquently and has a good grasp of major national issues. He could even be a candidate for “Prime Minister”! Like all senior UMNO leaders he probably has a sufficiently large “war chest” to finance his political activities! It is quite possible that he can prise away a significant portion of the rural Muslim vote in Sabah away from UMNO. Darel Leiking is quite popular in the Kadazan Dusun community. Many Sabahans harbor an anti-Semenanjung resentment relating to royalty payments, the immigration problem and the slow pace of promotions of Sabahans to senior positions in the government machinery. On top of that there are serious misgivings over the UMNO-PAS moves to Islamicize the country.

It is quite possible that there will be a swing of voters to the opposition in Sabah. At present only 3 out of the 25 parliamentary seats in Sabah are in opposition hands. With some smart deal making, that number could be increased to 12. But this can be sabotaged by the PKR if it insists on holding on to the majority of the seats it contested in PRU 13. If the Pakatan Harapan can conclude an electoral pact with the Barisan Wawasan, then the opposition can make significant gains in Sabah. Here the ball is in the PKR court, but can the faction ridden PKR rise to the occasion?

Sarawak on the other hand will probably remain a BN vote bank in PRU 14.

So, my rough projection is 89 – A + B would be the number of seats that the opposition coalition will get in PRU 14. “A” are the seats that PAS will probably lose to UMNO while “B” are the seats that the Warisan will win from UMNO in Sabah. My guess is – A = 12 dan B = 9. But this is based on the best case scenario where the Pakatan Harapan plays smart, does not aggravate the spat with PAS, and keeps three-corner contests to a minimum.

Pakatan Harapan and the PSM

The PSM applied formally to join the Pakatan Rakyat in 2012. That was a very controversial decision that led to serious internal arguments. But we managed to contain the disagreements by holding several consensus building discussion sessions. However the PR did not respond to our offer to join apart from asking if we supported the PR manifesto (to which question we said we did). Then came the debacle of PRU 13 where 3 out of our 4 candidates faced 3 corner contests with PR component parties, despite the fact that we have always said that we would work with the PR to bring down the BN. The Table below summarizes our results in PRU 13.

Table: PSM Performance in PRU 13

	BN	PSM Candidate	3 rd Party
Jelapang (PSM logo)	4,655	2,568	16,921 (DAP)
Semenyih (PSM logo)	17,616	5,568	13,471 (PKR)
Kota Damansara (PKR logo)	16,387	14,860	7,312 (PAS)
Sg Siput (PKR logo)	18,800	21,563	197 (Ind)

The situation has not improved. When the PR broke up, and the Pakatan Harapan (PH) was formed, the PSM was not consulted nor invited. At the announcement of this new coalition, when asked by some NGO activists and the Press why PSM was not present, some senior PH leaders mumbled something about PSM rejecting Article 153 of the Federal Constitution. This is not true – we uphold affirmative action for disadvantaged groups. (My debate of the Royal Address on March 2010 would give an idea of the stand PSM has taken on Article 153. It is carried as chapter 22 in my book “*Visi Alternatif untuk Malaysia*”.)

To be frank, joining the PH as a formal member would be problematic for us at this stage. It would be difficult to sell the idea to our quite vocal rank and file after the experience we went through in 2012 -2013. Also joining the PH would imply an endorsement of several of the shortcomings of the PR and PH governments including

- the failure of the PR to make any progress on the issue of local council elections;
- the neo-liberal policy position of the PR and the PH. For example -
 - The enthusiastic promotion of Health Tourism by the Penang and Selangor State Governments;
 - The tacit approval of the TPPA among several DAP and PKR national leaders;
 - Their use of FDI statistics to underline their success of their management of the State;
 - Lim Guan Eng's repeated arguments that the minimum wage should not apply to foreign workers.
 - The close association of several of the national PR leaders with IDEAS, an ultra right pro-market group.

There are many others.

- Money politics, especially within the PKR. This arises from the manner in which the PKR national leadership is selected. This also encourages factionalism. Each faction needs several million ringgit every 3 years for this leadership tussle.
- High level of graft within the Local Councils in Selangor.
- Lack of meaningful consultation within the PR. This is one of the factors leading to the breaking away of PAS.
- Failure to come up with an analysis of persistent rural poverty and a comprehensive policy package to overcome this.
- Overreliance on political stunts like – the September 2008 cross over, the Kajang move, the vilification of Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim.

But despite all this, the PSM is committed to bringing down the BN which we think is too corrupt and racist to be reformed or rehabilitated. So we are very prepared to work with the PH to avoid 3-corner contests.

The PSM has identified 20 credible candidates for PRU 14. By “credible” we mean candidates who have a track record in the constituencies that they would contest in. However in the interest of attaining one-to-one contests with the BN, the PSM would be prepared to compromise on a substantial number of seats if the PH agrees to let the PSM stand one-on-one with the BN in the remainder. But the current PH position that the PSM can only “pinjam” Sg Siput and that too only if I stand, is not something that the PSM can agree to. (Civil society groups who want to see one-to-one contests should speak to the PH leaders and ask them to accommodate the PSM and not push us into a position where we have to, if we wish to survive as an electoral party, fight back!)

Our conception: PSM – the party of the future.

When we formed the PSM 20 years ago, our main aim was to utilize the socialist vision to project an alternative path of development for Malaysia. We have chosen to do this not by elevating the Marxist classic to the status of scripture and spending a lot of time debating the classics, but by going to the ground to listen to the problems faced by ordinary people and developing both analyses and policies from this contact with the grass roots.

In the course of our involvement with the people we have developed a set of policy positions that are inter-connected and which are based on the understanding that many of our economic problems are due to the subservient position of countries like Malaysia in the Global Supply chain. The persistent poverty of some of our sectors is due to imperialism!

Some of the policy positions that we are advocating are:

- The distribution of national income to the poorer 60% of society should be by both increasing the minimum wage in stages and by strengthening the social protective net.
- Improving social protective net should include
 - subsidized good quality health care for all. This would require a freeze on the expansion of private health facilities because these undermine the public system by enticing away staff and specialists.
 - Free education up to college level.
 - Subsidized housing. (One house per family)
 - Universal old age pension after the age of 70 years.
 - a retrenchment fund.
- Working within the ASEAN framework to stop the “race to the bottom” where ASEAN countries compete with each other to win FDI by progressively reducing corporate tax and squeezing labour. We call for the reworking of the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement to use tariff sanctions to enforce a 1% increase in corporate taxes annually till all countries reach a tax bracket of 35%. ASEAN would have to lobby other trade blocks in the Third World to implement similar agreements.
- Democratizing society
 - Local Council Elections.
 - Referendums to discuss important national issues eg Nuclear power for Malaysia.

- Policy that 30% of the Directors in all GLCs are chosen by the people through national elections for 3 year terms. The directors so selected will be required to declare their assets annually, and to step down after a maximum of 2 terms.

- Decarbonizing society

- stop new coal fired plants for generating electricity
- decommission the most polluting coal and gas plants in stages.
- Use solar panels in all the dams that now generate hydro-electric power.
- mandate putting up of solar panels on all government buildings and the GLCs.
- spend more money on non-polluting sources of electricity power generation – solar, wind, tidal, etc.

- Public funding of political parties in a manner that is equitable. Putting caps on the amount of donations a party can receive from corporate sponsors.

We want to enunciate a vision of a future that can excite the imagination of the young people and build a political movement that is genuinely democratic and that leads to a high level of political consciousness in the ordinary citizens. Participating in elections and winning some seats is one of the ways we can use to enunciate this vision.

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