

# NEWSLETTER

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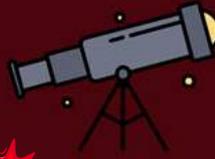
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## The most difficult election to predict



# The most difficult election to predict



With a day to go before Nomination Day on Nov 5, your Editor, Jamari Mohtar, feels the 15<sup>th</sup> General Election (GE15) would be the most difficult to predict on which coalition would helm the government mainly because for the past four years, Malaysians have had the experience of being ruled by three different coalition governments, all with a tenuous majority whose achievements were seen by the majority of the rakyat as far from satisfactory.

- When Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakub announced the dissolution of Parliament on October 10, many analysts were saying that the real contest in the 15<sup>th</sup> General Election (GE15) would be among the three political coalitions – Barisan Nasional (BN), Perikatan Nasional (PN) and Pakatan Harapan (PH).
- This is because since independence, no one political party has ever helmed the government.
- According to most analysts, BN with Umno as its lynchpin had the edge in winning the election, albeit with a wafer-thin majority.
- The basis for this is BN's continued victories in both the federal and state by-elections during the later period of the time PH helmed the government from May 2018 to February 2020.
- While PH did not perform well in the Sabah (Oct 2020) and Sarawak (Dec 2021) state elections, BN experienced a resounding triumph in the Melaka (Nov 2021) and the Johor (March 2022) state elections.
- The argument that it would be difficult for BN to win GE15 because many of Umno leaders are tainted with corruption charges seemed not to hold water, judging from its landslide victory in the Melaka and Johor state elections, and despite corruption being made the centre-piece issue by its political opponents during the two state elections.
- So far, only one Umno leader, former PM Najib Razak has been put to jail, ironically under a government led by an Umno PM, which has burnished its image as a party that does not interfere in the judiciary.
- By the time the Election Commission (EC) met on Oct 20 to announce nomination and polling days, some analysts and opposition politicians were saying BN is going to lose before even the battle begins for calling an election during a monsoon season with the threat of devastating floods occurring in the country.
- But time and again, even before Parliament was dissolved, the PN government led by an Umno PM has shown its readiness to cope with the flood by assuring the rakyat that it has a solid plan to mitigate the worst effect of a devastating flood should it occur during GE15 (see [Ignore govt flood mitigation efforts at your own peril](#)).
- Moreover, it has now come to the point that the rakyat have already accepted the inevitability of holding GE15 during the monsoon season because uppermost in their mind is to have their say via the ballot box, come rain or shine, to end the tenure of government with a tenuous majority.



- To them, it seems enough is enough with the idea of three governments with a tenuous majority in the last four years because it is the root cause of political and economic instability in the country, which has made them suffer so much.
- Even the opposition politicians seem to have accepted this inevitability judging from their muted voices on it now especially after the court has thrown out their legal suit against the government for holding GE15 during the flood season.
- Moreover, despite the monsoon season, all coalitions including BN are calling their supporters and fence sitters to come out in droves to vote, thus making a mockery of allegations that Umno wanted an election during the monsoon season in order to ensure voter turnout will be low, or the government is increasing air fare prices to prevent Malaysians who are working or staying overseas especially in Singapore from returning home to vote.
- Even the Yang di-Pertuan Agong has chipped in in trying to help all coalitions during his recent visit to Singapore when he made the call for Malaysians working or residing in Singapore to return home to vote, seeing that there are a sizeable number of Malaysians in the republic.
- When it comes to electing a stable government with a handsome majority, Umno is the first to use it with resounding success as an election slogan during the Melaka and Johor state elections.
- This clearly resonated with what the voters wanted

and thus, it is not a surprise that Umno/BN continues to use the catchphrase of “Stability and Prosperity” for its slogan in GE15.

- Meanwhile, PH’s slogan of “Kita Boleh” is nothing more than the Malay translation of former US president, Barack Obama’s successful campaign slogan in the 2008 US presidential election “We Can!”
- It is also quite similar with the slogan “Malaysia Boleh!” associated with the achievements of Malaysia during Tun Mahathir Mohamad’s first tenure as the PM from 1981 to 2003.
- But at least the “Malaysia Boleh!” slogan is not self-centred as it refers to Malaysian citizens compared to the PH slogan of “Kita Boleh” where the “Kita” (or “We”) refers to the coalition as explained by PH leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.
- Speaking at the PH convention in Ipoh, Anwar said: "Our slogan 'We Can' is based on the fact we will do whatever it takes to help the people ... We must win because we want to affect change in this country.
- "The issues faced by the people, such as high prices of basic goods like eggs, chicken and vegetables, are burdening the population."
- Unlike the BN slogan, which has proven to resonate with the voters in the Melaka and Johor state elections, it remains to be seen whether the PH slogan will resonate with the voters.

# TAWARAN HARAPAN

## PRU15

# PERIKAT NASIO



The most difficult election to predict



- Moreover, netizens have grown tired with the “Boleh” (“Can”) element of the slogan after BN had ruled the country for some 60 years and PH for 22 months, when they sarcastically mocked it as a “Boleland” with the negative implication of anything goes in Malaysia.
- But sloganeering is a small component of success in a GE. What matters are the issues, which is at the heart of the voters’ preoccupations and minds that will motivate them to vote for a certain coalition that seems to show empathy with them on these issues.
- In this regard, there are two equally important issues at the heart of the matter.
- The first issues are economic ones which include bread and butter issue like the high cost of living, affordable housing and healthcare, eradicating both absolute and relative poverties, enhancing social protection and social security, and increasing the national pie so that each citizen will have relatively more to enjoy life in a developed and high income nation.
- Although quite materialistic, these are very important issues because humankind is created in such a way that he has to fulfil his material needs first before he can effectively and efficiently fulfil his non material needs or idealism.
- The second issues that are equally important are the abstract and institutional ones (idealism) that revolve around abolishing corruption, inculcating good governance, equal access to opportunities (equity), fairness and social justice.
- These are very important issues too because of the adage that man does not live by bread alone.
- But as GE14, and the Melaka and Johor state elections showed, at different time the two issues will resonate differently with the voters.
- In GE14, it was the abstract and institutional issues that carried the day and caused a milestone in the form of an unexpected victory for PH, the first time in the history of Malaysia there was a regime change through the ballot box.
- This, no doubt, was brought about by the 1MDB issue and the arrogance of BN while in power for the last 60 years before GE14.
- In the Melaka and Johor state elections, it was the bread and butter issues that resonated and gained primacy with the voters, over issues such as busting corruption and good governance among others.
- This could be due to the fact that the nation then was suffering from the severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic where the material well-being of the rakyat was severely affected, so bread and butter issues became the most singular and uppermost thing in the minds of the voters.
- Another reason could be the rakyat can see that when given the chance to rule the country, PH proved to be no better than BN.



## The most difficult election to predict



- It could not solve some of the bread and butter issues that it promised to solve in its GE14 manifesto, while higher cost of living and affordable housing encapsulated in the phenomenon of the *perut* (tummy) economy remained core problems.
- As for the abstract and institutional issues, which have brought PH to victory, the moment it was in power all charges against Lim Guan Eng was dropped when his court hearing was already near its tail end.
- And despite the PH manifesto clearly spelling out the appointments of very senior government officials were to be made in consultation with a parliamentary select committee, and a politician must not head the Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission (MACC), a PH prime minister conveniently went on to appoint a politician as the head of MACC without even having the courtesy to consult his Cabinet.
- But this is not to say that BN will have a smooth path to an easy victory, albeit with a tenuous majority as most analysts think.
- This could well be true before Umno's president Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi committed a political hara-kiri a few days ago when on Nov 1 in announcing BN candidates for GE15, many incumbent Umno ministers were sorely missing from the line-up.
- By doing so, Zahid has raised again the spectre of the infighting within Umno between the court cluster and cabinet cluster, which will definitely weaken Umno/BN in GE15.
- So much for his claim that there won't be any vindictiveness on his part in choosing Umno candidates for GE15. Now the talk of the town is that he is allegedly aiming for the PM post should Umno win - big or small - in GE15.
- Infighting within Umno will not only destroy Umno but will also cause the rakyat to suffer if Umno helms the government, much in the same way the rakyat has suffered when the PH government was destroyed from within over the infighting on when should Mahathir hand over the premiership to Anwar that became a prelude to the Sheraton Move.
- So it looks like Umno / BN days are numbered as far as helming the government is concerned because there is also a complain among its members that BN failed to get at least 30% of its candidates to be women, as it pledged.
- But that does not make the prediction easier on which coalition - PH or PN - will win the election. Political analysts and observers including your Editor will have their work cut out for them to predict the winning coalition.
- In your Editor's opinion it could well be PN may just end up as the dark horse for GE15.
- To begin with, its slogan for GE15 is about right - 'Prihatin, Bersih dan Stabil' (Caring, Clean and Stable) where both the bread and butter, and abstract and institutional issues are harmoniously balanced and addressed.

The ink of a scholar is holier than the blood of a martyr  
*Hadith*

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# IF PN IS THE DARK HORSE OF GE15, WILL PH BE ITS WHITE KNIGHT?

- The PN coalition is led by Bersatu President, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. No one expected him to be the future PM because that seems to be the fate of almost all former deputy PMs of Malaysia since Anwar ousted the late Ghafar Baba as the DPM during a party election.
- Whether they were ousted, sacked or resigned from the post it never happened that such DPMs were able to make a strong comeback to become the PM including Anwar.
- When Mahathir resigned as the PM and failed in his attempt to become the PM of a unity government, the contenders for the post when all MPs were required to inform the Agong on who their preferred PM was in late February 2020 was still Mahathir and Anwar.
- No one seemed to think then that there could be a PM other than Mahathir or Anwar. But both failed to get the necessary minimum of 112 supports from the MPs during the interview with the King.
- Out of the blue later, Muhyiddin became the dark horse who went on to become the 8<sup>th</sup> PM of Malaysia with the support of MPs from PAS, Umno, 11 MPs from PKR and GPS of Sarawak, a total of some 117 support according to some account.
- Can history be repeated in GE15 when PN, which some analysts had predicted will wither away after GE15 becomes the dark horse that will win GE15?
- PN came into power at the time when Malaysia and the world were facing a scourge – the Covid-19 pandemic.
- About two weeks into power, Muhyiddin made a firm and bold decision to introduce the movement control order (MCO), which helped the country a lot in containing the daily infectious and death figures so much so that by early June 2020, the situation improved dramatically, and Malaysia was hailed internationally as good example of having good public health policies in countering a pandemic.
- Although the lockdown led to hardship for the people and the business community, encapsulated then in the famous trade-off between life and livelihood, it was somewhat mollified by a generous biggest economic stimulus package of all time ever dished out by a Malaysian PM to the tune of RM250 billion in March 2020 that benefits all citizens.
- All in all, under his premiership, about RM530 billion was provided for the rakyat and the SMEs in the form of stimulus packages under various names like Prihatin, Penjana, Pemerkasa and Pemulih, and various other assistance programmes.
- There were anecdotal evidences of some rakyat expressing gratitude to him for putting food on their tables during those trying times in the early days of the pandemic.
- During a focus group discussion organised by a think tank in 2021, some participants reportedly said that had the pandemic occurred if PH were still in power, it would not be able to manage it with the same decisiveness and boldness shown by PN.



## IF PN IS THE DARK HORSE OF GE15, WILL PH BE ITS WHITE KNIGHT?

- The Pemulih package later saw its amount being beefed up to an additional RM1 billion to ramp up the country's inoculation programme, including RM400 million to buy more vaccines.
- This would ensure 130% of the country's 32 million population would be covered, a record not many countries achieved then.
- His firmness in not wanting to compromise with the kleptocrats in Umno is legendary until even his erstwhile opponent former premier Mahathir admitted it as a salient feature of his administration.
- But again this does not mean the path to victory for PN is assured.
- This is because PN's rule was also known for the implementation of the unpopular emergency where Parliament was suspended for about seven months, and the appointment of politicians from political parties in the coalition government to head the GLCs and some government agencies.
- This is where the abstract issue of idealism comes to the fore, and become paramount when it is being used as a criterion to judge PN, when procedure wise, the declaration of Emergency and the appointment of politicians to GLCs were proper.
- So this again makes it difficult to predict which coalition will come on top in GE15.
- As for PH, it is possible for it to become a white knight because Anwar is taking a big gamble in contesting in Tambun, which is a make or break outcome for him.  
  
He could have easily won the election if he remains in Port Dickson, which is a mixed constituency. Instead he decided to go to Tambun, a Malay constituency where Harapan in general is vulnerable.
- And unlike in Port Dickson when his opponent was the "has-been" powerful politician Isa Samad, his opponent in Tambun is an incumbent MP Datuk Seri Faizal Azumu who's also the Deputy President of Bersatu and the caretaker Minister for Youth and Sports.
- Anwar could still win due to his big name and the prospect of a would- be PM coming from a Perak constituency becomes a reality, the first in history.
- But even this, who cares about a PM from a Perak constituency when all along the yardstick is a PM from a home state where he was born i.e. even if he becomes a PM, there is actually no PM hailing from Perak because he was not born in Perak unlike a Kedahan PM like Mahathir or Johorean PM like Muhyiddin.
- However, one has to praise Anwar for his ingenuity to change the description of a PM from where he is hailing, to a PM from which constituency he contested in.



## IF PN IS THE DARK HORSE OF GE15, WILL PH BE ITS WHITE KNIGHT?

- And he could be successful in this, again making the business of predicting the outcome of GE15 a very difficult affair.
- One more thing that makes predicting difficult was when the naming of candidates before Nomination Day, we saw dissatisfaction coming out in the open in Umno, DAP and PKR.
- If this leads to challenging the official candidate on Nomination Day, or efforts to ensure the official candidate loses, then it would be easier to predict.
- As it is now, Zahid's successful attempt to destroy the cabinet cluster in Umno is like a forgone conclusion that Umno / BN is already finished.
- Next is PKR when its deputy president Rafizi Ramli publicly said he wanted R Sivarasa to be retained as the Sungai Buloh's candidate but was overruled by Anwar, who picked former MIC treasurer-general R Ramanan.
- Adding fuel to this fire is PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution Ismail who has urged Rafizi to stop making public statements about the party's candidate selection process.
- The problem with Saifudin is his statement about Rafizi was also being made public instead of behind closed door.
- It looks like only PN is spared from this internal problem on candidates for GE15.
- Yes, Bersatu's former strategist Datuk Rais Hussin and its vice-president Datuk Mohd Rafiq Naizamohideen had resigned from the party but both resignations took place before PN announced its list of candidates.
- Moreover, the resignation of both has become a non-event that was not reported widely in the media as follow-up stories.
- So perhaps, PN could be the dark horse of GE15 and may even cause an upset by winning with a handsome majority.
- Of course, with the caveat it is still early days and predicting the results remains very difficult for political analysts and observers.



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We all know that the pandemic has taken a toll on the livelihoods of many Malaysians. With the lockdown (a.k.a. MCO or Movement Control Order in Malaysia) lifted for inter-district and inter-state travels, and with domestic tourism in full swing since the success of the pilot project on the Langkawi travel bubble, rays of hope are in the offing for the economy to be healed, and we can therefore expect a good fourth quarter GDP growth that will propel the economy to perform better and better, albeit gradually.

But as in the nature of things, there will be a delayed effect in that some *rakyat*s will continue to suffer from the economic impact of the pandemic in the sense that for them, especially for the vulnerable group, things will get worse before they get better. The Government, to its credit, is reaching out to this vulnerable group by pumping in more financial assistance, aiming to make Malaysia an attractive destination for foreign investors and to increase high value-added employment.

Some from the vulnerable group are enterprising enough to embrace the challenge by taking advantage of the burgeoning digital platforms where people are more and more beginning to do all sorts of things online (your Editor is no exception), including setting up businesses and working from their mobile phones, in order to make ends meet.

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Regards,  
Jamari Mohtar  
Editor, Let's Talk!

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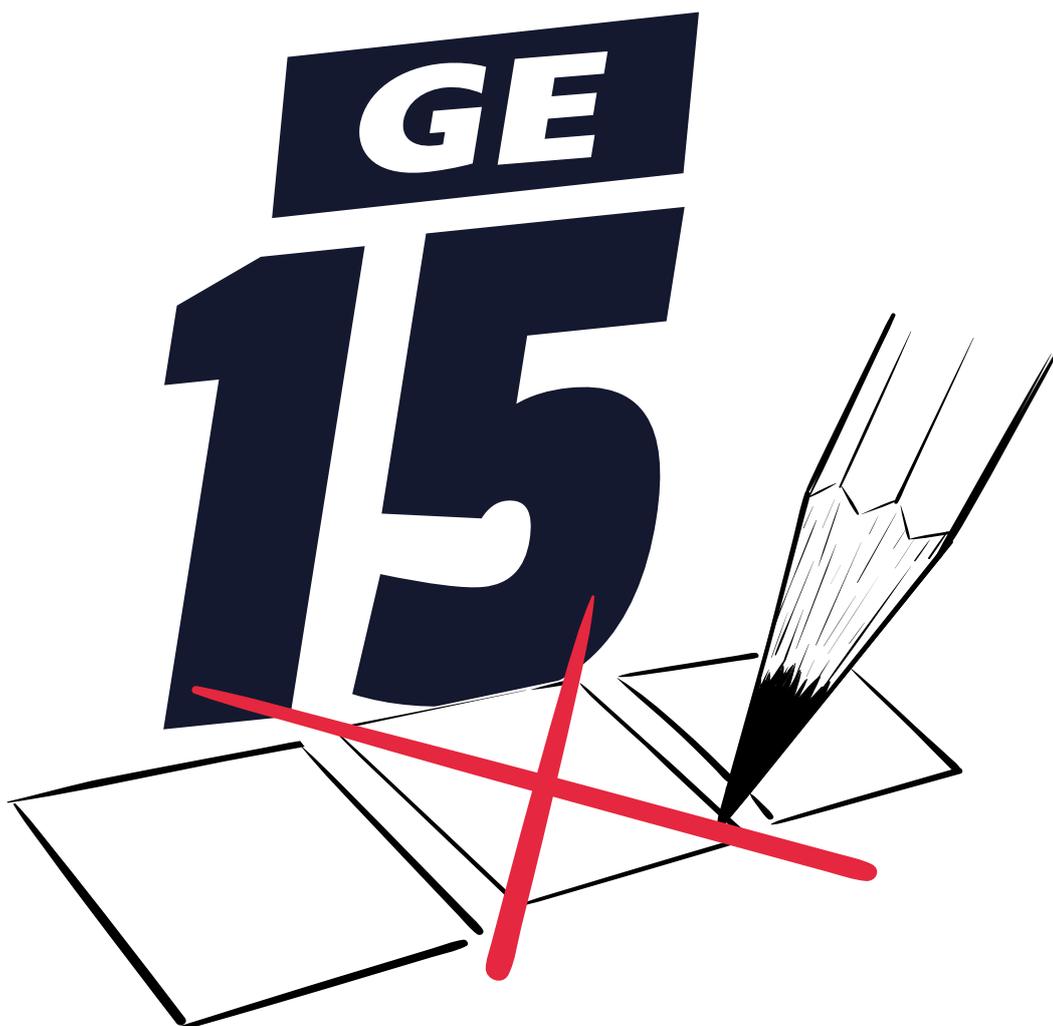
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