

# Malaysia: Pakatan Harapan Coalition One Year Performance Self-Inflicted

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**When Mahathir was asked how Anwar got his Black eye in 1998, Mahathir said it was self-inflicted by Anwar himself. Now if you asked me how was Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition performance in the last one year. I would say it was self-inflicted.**

Contents

- [9 May - a Critical Change](#)
- [Setbacks](#)
- [4. things what PH needs to \(...\)](#)

Is there a remedy? Of course there is, as long as PH starts acting like a ruling party with the majority mandate and move on from BN type politics. Currently PH seems like minority Government trying to clinch to power and trying to make each coalition partner happy and ending up - one step forward, one step backwards.

PH came to power because people were fed up with BN. The young voters wanted to give PH a chance. People were excited about change. When change didn't come instantly, The Ruling Party rather than embracing the mood of the day ended up blaming the previous government for everything and soon their excuses became stale. These wounds are not inflicted but self inflicted.

## 9 May - a Critical Change

Please don't get me wrong. The 9<sup>th</sup> May Change was beautiful and long overdue. The fact that the change of Government happened without any bloodbath is a great victory by itself and a great win for democracy.

For me two most important Institution change which we can see result was of the MACC and the Election Commission. Both have seemed to play their role impartially and will continue to gain public confidence. Another significant change we can see is the liberation of the media especially electronic and print media. But their role is not as significant as a game changer because even before this, actually online social media played the real work in opening up the space before election.

Mahathir was sober when he gave his cabinet 5 points out of 10. I wouldn't mind giving them a slightly higher score. Nevertheless most Malaysian seem to want to give the PM 10 points and his Cabinet -ve points. One can single out Anthony Loke as one of best Ministers for coming out with new ideas, marketing it and not going overboard in attacking his opponents.

## Setbacks

The biggest setback is that PH does not seem to get its act together. To say they are all new and inexperienced is not true. For the past 10 years, PH has already been controlling Penang and Selangor state. People like Azmin Ali, Muhyiddin, Saifuddin Abdullah, Lim Guan Eng Mukzir Mahathir are not new. Having Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim is a great advantage for the PH - both previously Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. But it seems like PH cannot click as a ruling party because of serious internal problems within the coalition partners, power struggle, style of work and major disagreement on all major issues.

There are five groups which are unhappy with the PH. The attacks to PH comes from five groups:

1. From the Former Ruling party - BN
2. From Right wing Islam on issues of race and religion
3. From the Rulers (monarch)
4. From the common people/marhaen
5. From the civic society

### **1. Attacks from the Former Ruling party - BN**

Against the former ruling party which is mainly UMNO, MCA, MIC, Gerakan and others. It looked initially that BN was completely wiped out with many people jumping ship etc but the last few months we have seen that BN has consolidated. PH strategy of attacking BN and its leaders after some time has lost its meaning and gone overboard. If one is to follow Parliament debates, the opposition seems to be raising some critical issues while PH MPs don't show enough fighting spirit in taking them on.

When UMNO leaders who still have a large following among the Malay community and rural folks, one has to be measured when attacking them. Most UMNO leaders have been seen taken to the court and PH leaders do not need to continue to mock them because voting trends will show that most rural Malay population voted for UMNO and PAS. PH Malays lost deposits in almost all seats in the East Coast. The best way to win them over is not ridiculing them but for PH machinery to do real grassroots work in the rural Malay heartland and FELDA, something which PSM has been telling them for ages.

### **2. Attacks from Right wing Islam on issues or race and religion**

This is where PH has been losing every battle from ICERD to Rome Statute. By the way, this is what I called self inflicted. Who told PH to table these two things when nobody asked for it and neither was it in their manifesto.

When they were under attack on the ICERD - in Parliament nobody could defend PH ministers. It was a pity because when Wathymoorthy speaks, nobody in PH backs him. DAP members won't talk about the issue while AMANAH members will try to play safe not to lose Muslim support. PKR members as well are split among the Pro Anwar camp and the pro Azmin camp.

Almost all Muslim countries in the world has endorsed ICERD therefore it should have a piece of cake to implement it or counter the arguments but PH retreated at the very end. On the Rome Statute, nobody knew it was an issue and the issue became actually more popular after Mahathir withdrew from it.

Some think these are deliberate moves by Mahathir to show DAP that these are sensitive issues and

only BERSATU can handle it.

However you look at it, in both these issues, PH was not a united voice. They hardly prepared or educated their own MPs or their own members on these issues before tabling it. Both the defeat on ICERD and Rome Statute are major defeats which could have been avoided. This is yet another self inflicted injury.

Similarly on the matriculation issue, PH once again showed they are not ready to dumb the race based policies for a needs based policies. Once again a proper explanation could have saved PH but again when it was announced PH Indians were going against their counterpart in BERSATU vice versa. That is because PH has yet to disband race and religion politics and are still running circles around the same BN mould. Can PH outdo BN in race politics where BN are far superior?.

Another example is when the Seafeld temple issue erupted; we again saw how PH showed that they were not ready to handle the issue holistically. Indians PH members and Malay PH members were on the odds on how Adib died and little was done to level off everybody on actual facts and real issues.

### **3. Attacks from the Rulers (Monarch)**

This seems like Mahathir is fighting a lone battle against the royalty and everybody else conveniently stays out. What will happen post Mahathir. It seems to me that Mahathir had more support when he handled the first constitutional crisis when he was an UMNO PM compared to when he was a PH PM. Then UMNO backed him well and he became victorious. This time it seems like he is on a lone fight and basing on his age, it seems time might not be on his side.

Once again the failure on Malay leadership especially from PKR and AMANAH to address these issues seems subdued. During the pre independence times, we had a strong left wing Malay nationalist parties like the PKMM, API and AWAS who were progressive and very pro people. Today PKR and AMANAH who is suppose to be much progressive than UMNO and PAS seems to show an attitude that on this issue, they are the same.

### **4. Attacks from the common people/marhaen**

There were two large groups of simple people who were very excited to see the change in government. One were those who wanted BN punished for swindling all our money whereas the second were those who were hoping that basic issues like employment, cost of living, will be resolved when PH came to power.

When PH came to power, they implemented some things very fast like banning cigarette in the restaurants, speed traps in highways etc but on major issues like minimum wage, subsidy for small holders etc, these were not happening.

The reason given was that Najib and gang has stolen all the money. But PH did not do much austerity saving in their own government except for taking a 10% salary cut. PH leaders continue to enjoy perks, travel in business class and use luxury cars to run daily business. They don't seem to share the burden felt by the majority of the people. Now the PM ask the rakyat to do 3D jobs and sacrifice. How can the rakyat appreciate these arguments when wages does not go up, goods go up while the income gap continues to grow. There is hardly much empathy shown to the poor except that they must sacrifice.

### **5. Attacks from civil Society**

I think there is a growing dissatisfaction between the NGOs, civil society and PH. It seems like both took each other for granted. The PH thought the civil society is on their side and therefore didn't expect them to be offensive whereas the civic society thought that PH will do serious reforms. Here there seems to be some serious issues because there are major differences among PH coalition partners on many issues like the death sentence, IPCMC, SOSMA, Sedition laws, PTPTN and others.

There are issues like appointment to GLC positions. There are issues like Institutional recommendation made which are not made public. So the more there are no reforms on these issues, it will appear that we are heading towards a BN 2.0.

#### **4. things what PH needs to do in the coming year**

##### **1. Give a date once and for all the transition plan from Mahathir to Anwar.**

If this is not done, then the next one year will be filled with politicking, lobbying and conspiracy theories. PH needs to move on. This has been the central question creating disunity and unnecessary speculation before election as well as after election. PH can do away with this distraction.

Form special committee and set clear timelines and datelines on when and how they want to implement their manifesto

##### **2. Second most contagious thing is the thirst of the rakyat on the unfulfilled manifesto.**

PH needs to set committee and set clear timeline so that they will not be continues being accused of U turns and they continue to be on the defensive

##### **3. Internal Consensus Building before implementing New and controversial Laws.**

PH needs to derive a method of creating, educating and popularising all the coalition partners, MPs and their members so that they can implement policies without having a tail in-between their legs. PH members needs to be confident, well informed and play as a team if they want to take on UMNO-PAS coalition.

##### **4. Consultation with the rakyat and civil society**

The best way to have this is to encourage elections at all levels- residents, kampongs, PBTs and after that proper consultation with the grassroots on every issues. Similarly the civil society and NGOs was a strong ally of the PH before. Now it seems PH is doing more lip service than actual consultation. Only through genuine partnership can genuine change take place.

Finally since these are self inflicted problems. PH can re-examine their base and win back the support. But if PH wants to win over BN in BN fortress in race and religion, then they will be doomed. Some called May 9 the birth of a new Malaysia and new hope. This can only come about when there is a real paradigm shift from race religious based politics to needs and fair based politics.

Wishing PH a prosperous year ahead.

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- THINK LEFT PSM on MAY 8, 2019:  
<https://thinkleft.net/2019/05/08/ph-one-year-performance-self-inflicted/>
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