

GE14 will witness a fiercer fight led by charges and allegations of corruption against the PM and his ruling coalition. As always the major challenges for the ruling party, as a result, has been met with political moves to guard and even benefit from gains in the upcoming election. - **Dr Vignesh Ram\***

Malaysia is heading towards what seems to be an early election as predicted by political pundits around the world. The embattled Prime Minister Najib Razak will be facing off with his guru and Malaysia's former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohammad who ruled Malaysia for more than two decades. The electoral dynamics in the current elections (GE14) has been made more interesting with the evolution of two coalitions i.e. Barisan Nasional the ruling coalition in Malaysia and the new Pakatan Harapan a coalition of old and new parties formed by the breakaway components from the ruling coalition.

The major party representations in Malaysia are largely based on ethnicity. Each component party represents one of Malaysia's major ethnic groups i.e. Malay's and Bumiputera, Chinese and Indians. Therefore, a good amount of Malaysian politics is dominated by race-based policies and considerations. Nevertheless, a new equation has also started to play a major role in the calculus. The divide between the urban and rural voters and the localization of issues have also formed an important part of the emerging debate in GE14. However, the 1MDB scandal which has cast PM Najib in the eye of the political storm has become a major rallying point for the opposition coalition. As days have passed more allegations and links are pointing towards the involvement of the PM in the scandal.



However, Malaysian politics has witnessed chaos and The 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal has been at the heart of it. The scandal amidst protests by pressure groups drove the wedge between Najib and his mentor Dr Mahathir leading, Mahathir joining the anti-Najib and Anti-corruption movement and finally launching Parti Pribhumi Bersatu now part of the opposition Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition. The calculation of picking Mahathir as the PM candidate could be seen as a strategy by the opposition to break into the crucial rural vote bank often seen as a BN forte. The probable effect which the opposition has come to call the 'Mahathir effect' could play a crucial role in the upcoming elections.

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Apart from the two coalitions, the Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS) is positioning itself as a “swing party” in the elections. Though the position of the PAS is at present more tilted towards the BN, its breakaway from the alliance with the PKR due to an ideological fallout a few years before has ensured that GE14 will result in a three-cornered fight.

Another key component has been the disillusionment of young voters led by a campaign on social media platforms known as the #undirosak movement. The movement is an effort by the mostly young voter to ‘spoil votes’ in the upcoming elections expressing displeasure with the current state of politics. Nevertheless, this brings another interesting dynamic in the electoral politics in Malaysia.

### **The Challenges in GE14**

GE14 will witness a fiercer fight led by charges and allegations of corruption against the PM and his ruling coalition. As always the major challenges for the ruling party, as a result, has been met with political moves to guard and even benefit from gains in the upcoming election. One of the major challenges for the opposition alliance is that of what it terms as ‘Ethnic Gerrymandering. There have been accusations by the opposition alliance that the majority of the seats which will suffer the brunt of the re-delineation exercise would be related to the opposition-held seats.



Similarly, another challenge which has been haunting both parties has been the spectre of fake news. The internet has become one of the main sources for, especially young voters to take note of news. The impact of the internet revolution has been such that political parties have supposedly employed cyber warriors to monitor and also rebut any false news being spread and which can have a key impact on the electorate. As a whole internet censorship has been growing in Malaysia with the ruling Barisan Nasional recently cracking down on artists critical of the government. The spread of fake news has been one of the most important election topics.

**[Read 1MDB: 8 Points You Should Know About World's Biggest Financial Scandal](#)**

## **New Hope for Malaysian Politics?**

The Pakatan Harapan (Party of Hope) as the opposition coalition is called has caught the attention of voters. However, its hopes of winning the elections in many more seats are constantly dashed by a number of issues created by the ruling party. Apart from the electoral boundary shifts, there have also been challenges to contesting in the election itself. For instance, the Registrar of Societies has been silent on according status to the PH. This brings about multiple challenges to the organisation to conduct under the PH banner. Among the probable votes for the ruling party, what can be observed is that the PH will be able to maintain some seats in the upcoming elections but it will be in a tight spot if there is a three-cornered fight where previous polls have showed that in such cases the BN is poised to win 90 percent of the time. The opposition has also been facing stiff competition due to the problems with its inability to come to terms with the distribution of seats.



SHAH ALAM 07 JANUARI 2018. Pengerusi Parti Pakatan Harapan, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad pada sidang media Konvensyen Pakatan Harapan 2018 di IDCC. NSTP/ HAFIZ SOHAIMI

However, there is a clear disconnect between the various components of the ruling coalition. For instance, The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) has been continually under fire for not being able to defend the basic rights of the Chinese against relentless attacks against prominent Chinese businessmen such as Robert Kuok by another component party UMNO. Similarly, infighting has brought the Malaysian Indian Congress to be less appreciated among the Indian's who have been sceptical about the populist measures put forth.

As Malaysia heads to the polls it is to be remembered that many new dynamics have been set into play. The election has been termed as the 'mother of all elections' by PM Najib who has assured that this would be an election which would determine Malaysia's future. The course of action will certainly set the trends in Malaysia for many years to come.



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