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**Bewildered in Malaysia  
Perplexed in Perak, stupefied in Selangor  
– no wonder the masses are agitated**

By Ooi Kee Beng  
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THE energy fuelling the electoral tsunami that saw members of the opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) win in five states in northern Malaysia last March was general indignation over the rapidly deteriorating state of governance in the country.

With the ruling coalition, the Barisan Nasional (BN), still not showing signs of reforming itself a year down the road, this indignation is turning into bewilderment.

The coup-through-defections against the PR government of Perak is still being played out, with the Sultan's decision to hand over power to the BN being challenged with full force.

The PR Chief Minister Mohd Nizar Jamaluddin has taken his successor as Chief Minister, Mr Zambry Abdul Kadir, to court for usurping his position, while the Speaker of the State Assembly, Mr V Sivakumar, has suspended Mr Zambry for 18 months from the legislature for contempt, and his five exco appointees for a year.

These latest moves are designed to force Sultan Azlan Shah to concede that all parties will have to return to the Perak electorate for the final say. The fear is that musclemen may be moved in to solve the constitutional crisis.

One further incident that is worrying the general public is the spreading of semi-nude photos of opposition leader Elizabeth Wong. These had been taken on the sly, apparently by an ex-boyfriend with his camera phone while she was asleep in her apartment.

Outraged, saddened and feeling violated, this prominent assemblywoman of Selangor state has offered to resign. There was pressure on her to act in order to pre-empt a

split in the PR, if and when certain Islamists may feel forced to criticise her for moral reasons. The coalition will decide her fate next week.

The vocal segment of the Malaysian public is expressing outrage over the fact that the apparent victim of a crime is being punished. This follows three lines of reasoning.

Firstly, had Ms Wong been a man whose semi-nude pictures, taken without his consent, were distributed to the mass media, political repercussions would have been minimal.

Secondly, the invasion of privacy in this case was so blatant the mass media should not have tried to capitalise on it, and politicians such as former Selangor Chief Minister Khir Toyo, a BN leader badly tainted by allegations of wrongdoings, should not be calling for her immediate resignation.

Thirdly, the country's ethical diversity is being denied to the extent that the supposed sensitivities of those most willing to demand ethical conformity of others are being given decisive and undue consideration.

While no link to the BN has been identified where the Elizabeth Wong case is concerned, most fingers are definitely pointing at elements in the government as the parties guilty of facilitating the release of the pictures.

Opposition parliamentarian Jeff Ooi has gone so far as to suggest on his popular website that Ms Wong's ex-boyfriend, Mr Malek Hilmi, was one of several "Trojan horses" placed within the PR camp as aides in the confusion following PR's surprise victories in last year's general elections. Another such "horse", claims Mr Ooi, was Mr Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, Mr Anwar Ibrahim's aide who has levelled charges of sodomy rape against his former boss.

Mr Anwar himself has also accused the BN for being behind the release of Ms Wong's pictures.

Premier-in-waiting Najib Abdul Razak has denied any BN connection to the case, and is challenging PR leaders to substantiate their claims. In the event, Mr Najib failed to take moral advantage of the situation to act as the Premier-in-waiting and take a decided stand against the political misuse of Ms Wong's ordeal by BN leaders such as Mr Khir.

A state of disbelief

In truth, the political game in Malaysia has reached the level where intrigues and hidden tactics are the order of the day, where the mass media, the police and the judiciary are no longer expected to act professionally, objectively, and with integrity.

Politicians, even leading politicians, are certainly not expected to act like statesmen, and in a non-partisan manner.

Under such circumstances, no one really expects any proof to be reliable or made readily available. Indeed, proof becomes rather superfluous where faith and trust in the institutions of state are in short supply.

Perception is everything in politics, and in Malaysia, where the BN has been in power since independence and controls — and has consequently compromised — all the institutions of government to varying degrees, any episode that hurts the opposition is invariably believed to bear BN's fingerprints.

No evidence either way, be it in the Perak crisis or the Wong case, or even in the many politically charged criminal cases being heard at the moment in Malaysian courts, is taken at face value by the public.

Malaysia's addiction to conspiracy theories is quite incurable, fed as it is by dose after dose of bewildering episodes and partisan posturing.

It is not only Perak that is suffering a constitutional crisis. The whole country is mired in a misguided democracy.

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