



# A New Malaysia: The Way Ahead

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On 29 August 2018, the Jeffrey Cheah Institute organised a forum entitled 'A New Malaysia: The Way Ahead', to discuss the future of Malaysian politics from the perspectives of the new Pakatan Harapan (PH) government; the Opposition; and Sabah and Sarawak.

Moderated by JCI Senior Fellow Prof. James Chin, the forum featured Lembah Pantai Member of Parliament, YB Fahmi Fadzil; Batang Sadong Member of Parliament, YB Dato' Seri Nancy Shukri; and Pangkor state assemblyman, YB Dato' Sri Dr Zambry Kadir; as panellists.



*"The 'first 100 days' concept is an American invention."*

Prof. James Chin

In his opening remarks, Prof. Chin clarified that he was not interested in assessing Pakatan Harapan's first 100 days in government, calling the 'first 100 days' concept an American invention that will not be able to

adequately assess the performance of a government. Instead, the purpose of the forum was to find out what to expect from the new government and opposition, and how the country can move forward in the wake of the recent election.

Responding to Prof Chin's query, Fahmi said that there are three key on priorities for Pakatan Harapan: the first is to 'clean-up' the government machinery that it inherited from the previous administration; the second is to fulfil the promises of the Pakatan Harapan manifesto; and the third is to chart the country's direction by implementing policies to deal with 'questions of the day' such as institutional reforms and the country's economic strategy.

Nancy Shukri retorted saying that the new office bearers should stop pointing fingers at the former Barisan Nasional (BN) government for every ill and move on with the administration of the country. She said that in the last parliamentary session, almost every PH minister was blaming the previous administration. "It is my third term as an MP. Being in government, a minister and an MP is not easy. We are trying to adapt to the new situation to be fair to the government. We will give them time. But we cannot keep putting up with the continuous blame on BN," said the former law minister.



*"Enough of blaming BN, move on and do your best."*

YB Nancy Shukri

Fahmi disagreed, however, arguing that the alleged wrongdoings of the previous government should not be glossed over as though nothing had happened. He said the truth needs to be disclosed to provide closure and to prevent future mistakes.

Nancy clarified that she was not implying that misdeeds be overlooked, and agreed that those who are found guilty of wrongdoing be rightfully punished under the law.

Prof. Chin then went on to ask the panellists how UMNO intends to reposition itself in the wake of its loss in the general election. Zambry, who was elected to the UMNO Supreme Council, said that there needs to be a lot of introspection and soul-searching within the party as this is the first time in history that UMNO was defeated at

the polls. The former Perak Menteri Besar said that UMNO needs to stop behaving as though it is still the government and look ahead to reposition itself as a credible opposition. Quoting Otto von Bismarck that politics is the 'art of the possible', Zambry said that UMNO must weigh all possible outcomes and potential strategies such as whether the party should form a new alliance, and if so, which other political parties it could align with.



*"The use of politically exclusivist vocabulary coupled with more radicalised action is fomenting a Trumpian force in Malay politics."*

YB Fahmi Fadzil

Fahmi, on the hand, expressed his concern that Malay politics could shift further to the right. "If we are not careful, by the time we get to GE15, we will see a ratcheting up of racial sentiments that are more extremist, more radical, more exclusivist," he said. "This will not bode well for the future of the country".

The PKR Communications Director predicted that while racial sentiments have always been exploited by UMNO, such narratives will be exacerbated by radical forces in the opposition who will break away from more moderate voices. He however welcomed reports claiming that UMNO has decided that its more controversial leaders, such as Sungai Besar Umno chief, Jamal Yunus, should 'take a break'. Citing the example of the United States' election of Donald Trump, Fahmi said that the

government must take steps to ensure that the roots of such exclusivist narratives are addressed adequately.

In response, Zambry said that some leaders who are branded as 'racist' are merely victims of political dissent. What is crucial is whether UMNO allows such inflammatory remarks. According to him, UMNO and BN have been the protector of the nation's peace and prosperity in the past sixty years. As such, this commitment to peace and prosperity means that UMNO will not condone personalities whose criticisms have racist undertones.

The panellists were then asked to comment on the issue of Sarawak's autonomy. Nancy said that many Sarawakians were of the view that their state had been enriching West Malaysia at the expense of its own development. She said that Sarawakians have often remarked, "we see the Petronas Twin Towers, but look at us, where are we?" Sarawakians therefore want the Pakatan Harapan government to honour the Malaysia Agreement of 1963, as they felt they had been short-changed. She believes that Sarawakians should be the ones dictating how much oil royalty the state should get, as the oil is in their soil.

Nancy, who was formerly co-chair of the Steering Committee on the Devolution of Powers, also shared that the steering committee under the previous BN administration was already discussing the quantum of royalty with Petronas prior to the change in government. To this, YB Fahmi responded that the Pakatan government is committed to honouring the Malaysia Agreement.

The forum concluded with Fahmi's exhortation that "democracy did not end on the 9th of May". Instead, the

process of democratic engagement must continue beyond the mere act of voting once every five years. Without the people's participation in the democratic process, both the government and opposition will fail in its tasks.



*"We have been the protector of the peace and prosperity of Malaysia."*

YB Zambry Kadir