



Ear to Asia Podcase

Title: Ending the cycle of political disarray in Malaysia

Description: Malaysia has witnessed a succession of prime ministers and political alliances over the past four years in what some observers say is the most serious era of political instability since independence in 1957. Meanwhile, Malaysia's grand old party, UMNO, dealt an unprecedented defeat in 2018 following a global corruption scandal and mass protests, is now back in power – dashing the expectations of religious and ethnic minorities. What will it take for the political turmoil to end in Malaysia, once a catchword for successful multi-ethnic economic development? Long time Malaysia watchers Professor James Chin and Dr Nadzri Noor shine a light on contemporary Malaysian politics. Presented by Ali Moore. An Asia Institute podcast. Produced and edited by profactual.com. Music by audionautix.com.

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Voiceover:

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Ali Moore:

Hello, I'm Ali Moore. This is Ear to Asia.

James Chin:

I think the mainstream parties like UMNO is in power, part of the reason is because without this ideology of Ketuanan Melayu Islam or Malay Islamic supremacy, they have very little hold over the Malay population. By making the minorities, Chinese and Indians, a threat to the Malay community, they can ensure support from the majority of the Malay population.

Nadzri Noor:

The politics of race and religion still continue. So in a way, Malaysian politics and national ideology is always like a pendulum, whereby the politics of Malay supremacy goes hand in hand with politics of integration very pragmatically.

Ali Moore:

In this episode, ending the cycle of political disarray in Malaysia.

Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at the University of Melbourne.

Malaysia has cycled through four prime ministers in forty months in what some observers say is the most serious era of political instability since independence in 1957. The nation's grand old party UMNO, or the United Malays National Organisation, was dealt a historic defeat in Malaysia's 2018 general election in the wake of a global corruption scandal involving then prime minister, Najib

Razak, as well as mass protests in Kuala Lumpur under the banner "Bersih", which translates to "Clean" in English.

While a new coalition under then 93 year old, former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad took power with promises of a more inclusive politics. It soon collapsed. And the subsequent changes of prime ministers resulting from shifting political alliances has dashed the expectations of Malaysia's religious and ethnic minorities. How did Malaysia once a catch word for successful multiethnic economic development in Southeast Asia, get to this state of political volatility? What does it augur for its democracy and future prosperity? And is there a way out of political turmoil and return to stability? To address these questions, I'm joined over zoom by experts in Malaysian politics, professor James Chin from the University of Tasmania, and Dr. Nadzri Noor from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. James and Nadzri, a very warm welcome to Ear to Asia.

James Chin:

Hi Ali, good to be here.

Nadzri Noor:

Good afternoon.

Ali Moore:

UMNO is now back in control of Malaysia, despite there being no actual national elections since their historic defeat in 2018. James, how did we get here with such a rotating bench of prime ministers? It's not the stable democracy, many hoped for four years ago.

James Chin:

I think that's a really good question to start this discussion. So, basically this story is quite simple. So, when Mahathir came into power after the first regime change in 2018, I think there was a great feeling of a new dawn for Malaysian politics. But, what they found was that Malaysian politics was too mired in the issue of ethnicity and religion, and they could not hold the country together, or the coalition together. So basically in 2020, the push towards a more Malaysian centric government, the pressure was so strong that the Mahathir administration collapsed and the new regime came into being called [Bersatu 00:03:12]. This new regime was basically led by people who were part of the previous coalition. And that regime was unusual, because it had an old Malay-centric, Islamic-centric parties ruling the government. That coalition lasted for just about one year, and in August last year, because of divisions within the coalition, a new government was formed this time under UMNO, the party that lost election in 2018.

Ali Moore:

So James, if I just stay with you for a minute before we look at who won, why did UMNO lose in 2018?

James Chin:

So UMNO lost in 2018, primarily due to two reasons. The first was that Mahathir Muhammad, Malaysia's longest serving prime minister, decided to defect the opposition and he managed to bring all the opposition in Malaysia under his leadership. So, he managed to cobble together a big tank where all the major opposition parties came under a thing called Pakatan Harapan or Alliance of Hope. So, that was the first major reason. The second major reason is, of course, the 1MDB corruption affair. I think at that point in time, in Malaysia, many people fed up with corruption and this is not a new thing. This is a long standing issue in Malaysia. And people felt that the then prime minister, Najib Razak, who allegedly stole about 6 billion U.S. dollars that was seen as grand

corruption. So, a combination leading Malaysia politician, Malaysia's longest serving prime minister defecting to the opposition combined with grand corruption allegations against Najib Razak. These two added up together that led the fall or the first regime change in Malaysia in 2018.

Ali Moore:

And Nadzri, if I can bring you in here, because James was talking in about how politics is so mired in religion and ethnicity. If we stay with 2018, to what extent of the fortunes of UMNO, and indeed other parties, being tied to race and religion. And to what extent is Malay ethnicity synonymous with being Muslim?

Nadzri Noor:

It is undeniable race and religion play big role in wooing voters, even since the first general election in Malaysia in 1955. And since then, Malaysian politics, especially in the peninsula, has been marked by politics of race and religion. Perhaps certain elections before 2018, such as in 1999, 2004, race and religion has been used rather aggressively by the ruling party to garner support, especially from the Malays. And the opposition forces, which are much more liberal under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim of 1997. And they have this problem to access to the Malay electorates, until as James argue, the incorporation of Mahathir in the opposition force, some of the Malay have some sort of confidence to support the oppositions because Mahathir and other conservative Malay elites has jumped to the opposition and allowed the opposition to make a breakthrough in 2018 general elections.

Ali Moore:

Nadzri, when those parties came together in 2018 with Mahathir having jumped ship as well, he took his Malay Muslim party Bersatu into that Pakatan Harapan coalition. Was it a coalition of convenience, or was it a coalition of shared values and policies?

Nadzri Noor:

It's more a coalition of convenience. It's rather shortsighted and the objective is just to win the election and oust Najib. And that's the reason why the stability of the coalition was significantly compromised when they able to get into power in 2018.

Ali Moore:

So, James was Pakatan Harapan popular with voters. Clearly they succeeded in winning the election. But, with UMNO having been in power for so long, how was it perceived post-election by people?

James Chin:

So, I think, immediately after 2018, at least for the first 12 months, I think Pakatan Harapan was genuinely popular. I think after 60 years of UMNO ruling Malaysia, people were essentially looking for new dawn. I think it's also important to remember that people were really fed up with grand corruption, especially the 1MDB affair. So, people were looking towards Pakatan Harapan for new reset for Malaysia. But, unfortunately I would argue that the second year onwards, I think, people started losing faith in the Pakatan Harapan for various reasons, but the main one being that there was sort of a general consensus in the Malay community that perhaps they were giving too much power to the non Malays, that's the first issue. But, the other key issue that came back against Pakatan Harapan very strongly in the second year on was Mahathir's inability to resign at the end of the second year and pass power to Anwar Ibrahim.

Ali Moore:

Because, that was a deal wasn't it-

James Chin:

Yes.

Ali Moore:

That was done?

James Chin:

So, that was the general understanding among the Malaysia public heading toward us 2018, that when Pakatan get into power, Mahathir will rule the first half, and the second half of the five year term will be given to Anwar Ibrahim.

Ali Moore:

So James, let's explore the first part of what you said there a little further, the role, I guess, that the fear Malay supremacy was not being upheld, the role that played and the evidence for that. Why was it that people were able to feel like that? And indeed the parties themselves?

James Chin:

I think there were several reasons. I think what happened that was not anticipated after 2018, was you have to remember when UMNO was in power, the most important challenge of the UMNO was the Islamic party of Malaysia, or better known as PAS. So, nobody could foresee that with the fall of UMNO, UMNO actually created a strategy alliance with PAS. So, he had two major Malay parties UMNO and PAS coming together, selling a very simple narrative to the Malay population, especially the conservative Malay population in rural areas, that the Malays would be marginalized by this Pakatan Harapan government, and that the non Malays in the Pakatan Harapan government had too much power. And therefore over the long run, the Malays will lose power of Malaysia supremacy. In terms of the evidence, the sort of narrative they were providing was basically that key government positions were given the non Malays.

So, the favourite example they want to give was that for the very first time since independence, a non Malay, in fact, a native person from the state of Sabah was appointed as chief justice. What was even worse was that this guy was a practising Catholic. So, they used that very strongly against the Pakatan government. The other big issue they used against the Pakatan government was that the Pakatan government was in the process of signing up international conventions on elimination of race and religion, and international political rights. I think many people in the conservative Malay community were very worried that all these international conventions eventually will lead to a loss of Malaysia supremacy in Malaysia.

Ali Moore:

And Nadzri, should we give some context around this for people who are not aware, but this concept of Malaysia supremacy and affirmative action for the Malay majority is very entrenched in Malaysia isn't it? It goes back to the new economic policy of 1971. Can you give us a sense of what it means in practise.

Nadzri Noor:

In practise, the Malays considered that Malaysia now belongs to the Malay. It's in a way a nation by blood by culture, rather than citizen. Perhaps some Malays consider non Malays as fellow citizens, but not fellow nationals. So, this aspirations has been filled by, especially by UMNO, using its politics of race and culture, and perpetuated through the political system, state structures, even through the

education, mass media to evoke the imaginations of Malaysianess discussing about Malay rights, Malay interest. And that's the reason why apart from being dominant majority and always supported by the national government, even during Pakatan Harapan years with Bersatu, the Mahathir party in the dominant position and other political machinations in the political system, such as the position of the Malay in the constitution, Malay language, special interests, Islam as the official religion of the country.

And by adding up all of these things, from time to time when the Malay's interest perceived to be under threat, the government will retaliate with certain policies that will strengthen symbolically the strength of the Malay to help the community to in a way dominate or at least sit at the same level with other communities. And that's the reason why. Especially after the 1969 general elections whereby the non Malay parties or non UMNO, garnered more supports, and also constituencies. The government in 1970 retaliate by introducing the national economic policy practically to support the rise of Malay middle class, and also elite until 1990. And the spirit of NEP or the New Economic Policy is still here in Malaysia.

Ali Moore:

When we look at the collapse and the failure of Pakatan Harapan, what about the role of the civil service, Nadzri? I wonder after so many decades in office, how blurred were the lines between UMNO, the previous government, and the civil service? And to what extent, or what role, would they have played in the success or failure of Pakatan policies?

Nadzri Noor:

Of course, the civil service constituted part of the regime through 60 years of BN rule in Malaysia. There was blurry line between the state and also the bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy in way has been UMNO-nised, if I can use that word.

Ali Moore:

I understand what you mean. Yes.

Nadzri Noor:

And a number of disciplinary actions and machination has been done to UMNO-nise the public service including to appoint loyalist to top positions. And in fact, the bureaucracy or the state has been used to perpetuate the UMNO rules through various ways. They were and are used in the elections, for example, to get into the people, to give public service in the name of UMNO. And internally, there was what they equal certain political oath that public servant need to take to show support, not to the constitution, but practically to the ruling elite, or the ruling party. And that's the reason why they work not only to serve the people as public servant, but also, perhaps, as party workers for the ruling regime. And during the Pakatan Harapan years of that 22 months from 2018 to 2020, they have become one of the challenge by the Pakatan Harapan government is effectively delivering their policies. At the same time, they perhaps has frustrated or has leaked certain valuable informations to the oppositions at that time. And this has caused Pakatan Harapan government cannot perform effectively.

Ali Moore:

We get to 2020, and James, Pakatan Harapan collapses, Mahathir resigns as prime minister. The new leadership of his Bersatu party takes Bersatu out of Pakatan and forms a new coalition with UMNO, that didn't last either, UMNO lost confidence in their coalition partners. It sounds quite extraordinary.

James Chin:

So, I think, the way to understand the 2020 change of regime is that within Pakatan Harapan itself, they face tremendous pressure for the Malay population who were starting to believe the narrative that the Pakatan Harapan government was too much influenced by the non Malays. So, when Bersatu broke away and formed a new coalition, the unique thing about this coalition was that it consists of only Malay-Islamic parties in Malaysia. So, you had Bersatu, and you had UMNO the previous ruling party, plus you had Islamic party PAS.

So, this was the first time in Malaysia's political history where the federal government consists of only Malay-Islamic parties. Now that government did not last, in fact, it led to another regime change in August last year. It did not last for very simple reason. You have to remember that during this time, the leadership of UMNO, including the president and of course the ex leader Najib was still under corruption charges related to the 1MDB affair. So they thought that when they came into power in a coalition with Bersatu, all these charges will be dropped. But the Bersatu leadership decided not to do anything, not to intervene with the judicial process in Malaysia, and because of that, UMNO led by Zahid and Najib Razak, who's still very influential in Malaysia politic. They decided to put a block on Bersatu. And that's the reason why in August last year, the Bersatu government fell and new coalition under UMNO rose from the ashes.

Ali Moore:

The new coalition under UMNO. If we go to 2021 Malaysia's king appoints the next prime minister, doesn't he?

James Chin:

Yes. The way it works in Malaysia is that if the politicians can't come to a consensus, or there's no clear majority in parliament, under Malaysia's law, the king has the right appoint any politician he feels will command the majority in parliament. So in this case, basically what the king did was that the king asked every MP in Malaysia to submit, I think, was statutory declaration about who of support. So, in both cases in March, 2020, and in August, 2021, they went through this process. And that was how the prime minister was appointed.

Ali Moore:

You're listening to Ear to Asia from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. And just a reminder to listeners about Asia Institutes online publication on Asia and it's societies politics and cultures. It's called the Melbourne Asia review. It's free to read and it's open access at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. You'll find articles by some of our regular Ear to Asia guests and by many others. Plus you can catch recent episodes of Ear to Asia at the Melbourne Asia review website, which again, you can find at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. I'm Ali Moore. And I'm joined by seasoned observers of Malaysian politics, Dr. Nadzri Noor from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and Professor James Chin from the University of Tasmania. So James, just picking up where we left off before that show or break, essentially in 2022, where we sit at the moment, is Malaysia back to where it started with UMNO firmly back in power?

James Chin:

Yes and no. So yes, in the sense that we've come a full cycle, UMNO lost power in 2018, and in 2021, they regained power. The UMNO nominee became the prime minister of Malaysia. But, my argument is that whether Malaysia comes to a full cycle completely will be decided in the next general election, what they call the 15th General Election or GE-15. And that will be held later this year. My argument is that if that election UMNO does very well and UMNO is confirmed by the voting public, then yes, we have come a complete full cycle. And again, this is not unique to Malaysia. In fact, the experience of Malaysia is very similar to what happened to the LDP in Japan.

Some of your listeners will remember that the LDP lost government in Japan, and three years later they came and back to form the new government again. So, in some ways we might be looking at a complete cycle in Malaysian politics as well.

Ali Moore:

So let's look at the circumstances, the broader environment that we are in prior to that general election. Nadzri, economically and socially, what have been the consequences of the past three years of political upheaval, because of course we've had a pandemic at the same time?

Nadzri Noor:

For example, the change of government in 2020, the day the new regime, or the Pakatan Harapan collapse in February, 2020. The Malaysian stock exchange lost around 7 billion dollars. Since then politics in Malaysia has been unstable, even though Malaysia under UMNO and also Barisan Nasional rule for that 60 years was authoritarian in nature. But, stability is one of its character. And since 2020, we couldn't characterise Malaysia politics or the state as stable anymore. And because of that, the ruling regime at the time, Muhyiddin Yassin who took over the premiership from Mahathir in March, 2020 has avoided parliamentary checks. For about a year there was poor management and the regime was politically weak and too distracted to gain political support rather than focus on governing Malaysia with good governance and focus on the implications brought by the pandemic.

Ali Moore:

And Nadzri, the implications of the pandemic, you did talk about what happened to the market when there was this instability politically. But, there have been devastating consequences for people haven't there in Malaysia because of the pandemic and because of the weaker economy.

Nadzri Noor:

Yah, because of the shift in the political system, from the weak democracy, perhaps under Pakatan Harapan, and what's essentially authoritarian because there's no checks, the people are not in a way empowered to speak up, except through the social media. So, the government become less responsive, and because of its weak political support, they are too distracted and too focused on gaining new support. And also, their political standing, and this contribute to its weak policies and response for COVID 19 implication.

Ali Moore:

James, can I ask you, is economic security key? And is that what the former Pakatan Harapan coalition was not seen as providing?

James Chin:

No. I think the key thing with Malaysia heading towards the next general election was that I suspect this election will not be a normal election. We have seen other parts of the world, how after two years of lockdown, basically the voters are looking for stability. They're looking to put the country back to a normal path and I suspect the same thing will happen in Malaysia. The other important point to remember is that although the country has undergone through tremendous change under COVID 19, the underlying drivers of politics – race and religion – is still a very powerful tool in Malaysia. The only difference with GE-15 is really is up to the Malay community, which political party they want to support.

And my argument is that now there are two major Malay political parties, Bersatu, the other one's UMNO, and the Malay polity will have to decide which one they will support. Because, if they split their vote in GE-15, then we will see more political instability. If the Malay voters vote strongly for

either Bersatu or UMNO, and this party get into power, then we will have a measure of political stability. And I think coming out of COVID, I think this is what the polity in Malaysia is looking for. They're really looking for stability, because the last three years in terms of political and economic instability is really been quite a horrible thing in Malaysia.

Ali Moore:

Do you think though, James, that UMNO is poised to take power back alone, they are poised for a big win? Or is it too early to say?

James Chin:

I think the momentum is with UMNO. So, if you look at the last three state elections, last six months in Melaka, in Sarawak, in Johor, UMNO or it's proxies have done very well in both Melaka and Johor, UMNO actually won two thirds majority. One of the interesting things about Malaysia politics is that two thirds majority is seen as the indicator that you are in complete power, because you need two thirds majority in parliament to pass constitutional amendments. So, UMNO has the momentum, whether they can keep the momentum until the next general election will be dependent on how fast the economy can recover. That's number one. And secondly, whether the opposition can come together, like what they did in 2018, and put on a United front against UMNO. So, there are still some issues out there, but by and large, I think the momentum with UMNO at the present moment.

Ali Moore:

James, from an outside point of view, it's easy to look at that and say, "It's only four years since UMNO lost power, and its leader has now been sentenced to 12 years in jail on corruption," which of course Najib Razak is appealing and he is out and about campaigning, but are people prepared to overlook that. Is that not important?

James Chin:

I think you have to understand that political culture in Southeast Asia is very different on say political culture in Australia, other Western countries. Although it is true that Najib as we found guilty and in fact it lost his appeal. People do not see corruption the way you might see corruption in the west. This is not a new thing in Southeast Asia, because one of the interesting things happening right now is that the next president of the Philippines could be Bongbong Marcos, the son of Ferdinand Marcos, who we all know is one of the most corrupt leaders that's ever come out Southeast Asia. So yes, it is possible for Najib to make a run for the prime ministership again. But again, it will depend on how he plays his card. So far he has been quite successful in repackaging himself under the moniker "Boss ku". Basically, he's using the social media very effectively.

Ali Moore:

And tell us about that, Monica, just before you move on for those people.

James Chin:

Sure. "Boss ku" means "My boss" and he supporters at every election rally he goes to, he supporters who shout "Boss ku, apa malu". In other words, there's nothing to be ashamed of my boss. In other words, they're saying that the 1MDB is just history, water under the bridge, and that really doesn't matter. I think the other thing that is happening is that people do realise that one of the interesting thing was that when Najib was in charge from 2009 to 2018, Malaysia actually saw strong economic growth. So, people are thinking that, "Yes, this guy's a crook, but maybe he has the major formula to bring Malaysia back in economic terms."

Ali Moore:

And I'll come back to the economy in a minute. But before I do that, Nadzri, can I ask you, how do you see the prospects for UMNO and Razak going into the general election?

Nadzri Noor:

So, in the current state election in Malaysia, lately in Melaka and also in Johor, UMNO has a big potential to make big comeback in the next election. We can see that 1MDB is no longer issue among the Malays and the situation has changed very significantly in contrast to the previous elections. And COVID 19 in a way has at once side discredit the current administration, but at the same time also help the administration to regain power in the two state election in Melaka and also in Johor. The voters turnout were lower in the two states. Most of those who go for voting actually UMNO loyal supporters, Pakatan even during the 2018 General Election relies their vote from out-stationed voters, meaning voters from Kuala Lumpur from Singapore, from other urban centres, especially in peninsula Malaysia. So, the COVID 19 pandemic in a way has demotivate them to go for vote, because fear of getting contracted. In these two states, whereby there are a huge number of UMNO strong holds.

And most of the UMNO voters are local people, and due to certain machinations and aggressive politics played by UMNO, especially also by Najib using his influence over the Malay community. And many of them turn up during the voting day. And even though they only garnered around 40% of the popular vote as what James has mentioned, they managed to win both of the election with two thirds majority. So for them, once again, as what James has argued, the psychology of Asians, the Malays is different than those in well industrialised and advance democracy.

Ali Moore:

Will UMNO also use supremacy of Malays again in this campaign? And will it be an argument that if you support the opposition, your life will not be so good?

Nadzri Noor:

Yeah, I think they will do that once again, but rather pragmatically. So, in front of the Malay electorate they will play up these politics. But, in front of its Chinese allies, especially the MCA, Malaysia Chinese Association voters, they will play around certain politics of integration. Like the current government of Ismail Sabri it has this political ideology of what they frame as [foreign language 00:30:22] Malaysia, or Malaysian family. But, the politic of race and religion still continue. So in a way, Malaysian politics and national ideology, even during the first Mahathir team, as the premier in 1981 and later on Najib Razak, and now under [Isam 00:30:43] is always like a pendulum, whereby you know, the politics of Malays supremacy goes hand in hand with politics of integration, very pragmatically, Ali.

Ali Moore:

It's an interesting argument, or an interesting point that you make Nadzri. And James, I wonder, can you see a day in Malaysia where politics is not so mired in ethnicity and religion?

James Chin:

Unfortunately, no. I think as long as the mainstream parties, like OMNU is in power, the reason why they exist is because of this ideology of Ketuanan Melayu Islam or Malay-Islamic supremacy. Part of the reason is because without this ideology, they have very little hold over the Malay population. By making the minorities – Chinese and Indians – the boogeyman, is a threat to the Malay community that can ensure support from the majority of the Malay population. Unfortunately, the way it works in Malaysia is that this ideology of racial supremacy is tied to economic benefits. As you mentioned

earlier in the programme, there was this thing called the New Economic Policy, although it's framed as affirmative action, the reality is that the majority of the population actually have access to state resources through the NEP. So, a very simple example of that, and this is quite shocking to people outside Malaysia, is that if you're a Malay person in Malaysia, if you were to buy a new house from a private developer, normally the private developer will give you a house discount between 7 to 15% purely, simply because you have Malay or you are classified as a Malay person.

So, ethnicity plus Malay supremacy comes with clear economic benefits, including things like a special university that was established just for the Malay and Muslim community. So, I don't see these things being stopped in Malaysia anytime soon. And in fact, I will argue the reverse that is going to get worse moving forward.

Ali Moore:

James, you talked earlier about how last time, when UMNO was in power, there was very strong economic growth, affirmative action policies like you've just been describing, do not come cheaply. Can that economic growth be repeated if UMNO does get back in power in a big way. And how sustainable are those affirmative action policies for the state?

James Chin:

One of the things that people keep forgetting about Malaysia is that Malaysia actually has a huge reservoir of natural resources. So yes, the affirmative action policy can continue for many years to come. The other way they've done it is that they've done it in quite a clever way. The affirmative action policy at the business level is handled differently. So, at the business level, they're not talking about giving business opportunities only to the Malays themselves. What they do is that they control the licencing system. So, for example, they will only issue licences to the Malay companies, and the Malay company who subcontract the work out to anybody, Malays or non Malays, it doesn't matter. So, through this process of what we call rent seeking in economic terms, this system actually lasts for a very long time. As long as the country is rich you can afford it

Ali Moore:

As we draw our conversation to a close, do you think Nadzri that we are going to see a period of stability or an end to the instability with the outcome of the election? And what do you think could help the extraordinary party shuffling that we've seen over recent years? Is there so way of trying to prevent that being so easy?

Nadzri Noor:

Before we talk about the preventions, even though Malaysia was in critical impasse for about two years until the current government has strike memorandum of understanding of cooperation with the opposition to stabilise the national government, and thus give the national government more time to focus on the national issues. Because, the government is too weak right now, it also has to listen to the opposition, and also the terms of agreement in that MOU. One of them is to have certain new machinations to have political stability in Malaysia. And one of them is to have an anti hopping law, which is currently been discussed in the Malaysian parliament.

The alternative that is currently been championed by many civic association is to have recall elections, the law of recall elections whereby if a legislator jumps from one party to another after the elections, he or she need to relinquish his position and compete in a fresh election, a new elections, and regain the support from the people. I'm not sure whether this is possible or not, because this alternative political mechanism will take time. But, I think, perhaps in the short run, they might pass this anti hopping law. And by having this, at least in next General Election, we could see better stability in Malaysian politics.

Ali Moore:

James, do you agree with that?

James Chin:

I think I have to reiterate my view which is that the crucial thing for Malaysia is really the next General Election, whether the elections were written strong mandate to one side, either the governing side or the opposition side, and whether you have one strong Malay party that sort of put a lid on everything else. Until you get that formula, strong Malay party, a strong coalition, I think, Malaysia will be heading for turbulent times.

Ali Moore:

And you don't see that there would be realistic moves in the shorter term towards things like recall elections?

James Chin:

No, for a very simple reason that there's a bit rush now to get the parties together for the next General Election. My position is that things like anti hopping bill recall elections, those things are not as important as the other bill that people are talking about over the last few years. And that is to limit the tenure of the prime minister. I think one of big problems you'll find not only in Malaysia, in Southeast Asia, is that very often trouble starts when you have a person who's been in charge for a very long time. So, Mahathir was in power for 23 years, and many of the issues you see in Malaysia today were actually caused by him in the 1980s and 1990s. So, my wishlist is actually for parliament to pass the law to limit the term of the prime minister to two terms, or maximum 10 years. I feel that's a much more important thing rather than anti hopping law.

Ali Moore:

And enormous thank you to both of you for your insights and for joining us here on Ear to Asia. It's been wonderful to talk to you, and I'm quite sure that we will be talking again with those elections likely to be held at the end of this year. Many thanks indeed for your time.

James Chin:

Thank you.

Nadzri Noor:

No worries.

Ali Moore:

Our guests have been Professor James Chin from the University of Tasmania and Dr. Nadzri Noor from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Ear to Asia is brought to you by Asia Institute of the University of Melbourne Australia. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website. Be sure to keep up with every episode of Ear to Asia by following us on the Apple Podcast app, Stitcher, Spotify, or Google Podcasts. If you like the show, please rate and review it. Every positive review helps new listeners find the show and help us by spreading the word on social media. This episode was recorded on the 14th of April, 2022. Producers are Kelvin Param and Eric van Bommel of profactual.com. Ear to Asia is licenced under creative commons, copyright 2022, the University of Melbourne I'm Ali Moore. Thanks for your company.