

ISEAS

**Trends in
Malaysia II**

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Malaysia in 1973: The Search for A New Political and Economic Order

Yong Mun Cheong

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

POLITICAL developments in Malaysia over the last few years must be seen against the background of the successful formation of coalition governments at state and federal levels between the ruling Alliance party and some of the opposition political parties. This process began in 1970 when the Sarawak Alliance and the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) formed a coalition state government. Prime Minister Tun Razak followed this up by establishing coalitions with the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (GRM) in Penang in February 1972; with the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in Perak in May 1972; and with the Partai Islam Se Malaysia (PAS) in Kelantan in January 1973.

The coalition between PAS and the Alliance was the most extensive of all. It was effected in all states in which PAS held seats. Thus PAS was given seats in the Executive Councils in Trengganu and Perlis and, of course, Kedah, where the party had made significant headway and gained many seats normally controlled by the Alliance (or, in fact, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) which is the dominant party in the Alliance). In return, the Alliance was given two seats in the Kelantan State Executive Council, which, however, remained under PAS control. At the federal level, the Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) of Kelantan and the PAS national leader, Datuk Mohamad Asri Muda, was appointed Minister of Land Development and Special Functions (i.e. in charge of the National Council for Islam). Shortly after, it was announced that Kelantan would be granted \$2.4 million for rural development and also that mosques, schools and roads would be built. Tun Razak even expressed the hope

that there would be electoral co-operation between PAS and the Alliance in the next general elections.

Thus the Alliance government in the early 1970s attempted to solve a political problem that had emerged in 1969 as a result of the last general elections, namely, how to establish the central government (the Alliance) as the representative spokesman of all the races in Malaysia and, in the process, ensure inter-racial stability that had been seriously undermined as a result of the 1969 riots. The coalition governments extended Alliance control or influence into those states that it had lost to the opposition parties in the 1969 elections. At the same time, coalitions with predominantly non-Malay opposition parties compensated for the comparative loss of support for the non-Malay constituent parties of the Alliance.

The formation of the coalition governments was not plain sailing all along. For PAS, the coalition with the Alliance was a divisive issue. At a PAS delegates' conference to vote on the issue, 194 delegates voted for and 90 voted against the coalition. There were 14 abstentions and some 30 delegates stayed away from the vote. Members of the PAS opposing the coalition felt that PAS was making political headway on its own in Trengganu, Perlis and Kedah. To form a coalition with the Alliance at this juncture would be poor strategy. Datuk Asri, on the other hand, saw the coalition as a means of getting funds for Kelantan's economic development and at the same time enhancing his own and PAS' political position. As stated above, some federal development funds were allocated for Kelantan following the coalition but whether such funds were sufficient to boost Datuk Asri's and PAS' political position is not yet clear.

The issue of coalition has thus split the PAS. This was borne out in the recent by-election held as a result of the resignation of Tengku Abdul Rahman (the former Prime Minister) from his Kuala Kedah constituency seat when PAS was obliged to instruct its supporters to vote for the Alliance candidate (Datuk Senu bin Abdul Rahman, the UMNO Secretary-General). His opponent was Siti Nor, a bank clerk and daughter of Hamid Tuah — the campaigner for land for