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Analysis-PAS

UPHILL TASK FOR PAS TO TOPPLE THE BARISAN NASIONAL

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KUALA LUMPUR: The opposition Pan Malaysia Islamic Party or PAS has made many claims, one of which is its capability to topple the Barisan Nasional government and transform Malaysia into an Islamic nation in the forthcoming election.

Apart from re-capturing Kelantan with relative ease, it said it would also not encounter much problem in seizing control of several other predominantly Malay states such as Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis.

However, most political analysts are skeptical about the claims and see them as yet another dream of PAS, although, admittedly, it has some edge in Kelantan which it captured from the BN with the collaboration of the now defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46), Berjasa and Hamim, in the 1990 general election.

Likewise, they are not at all convinced that PAS could fulfil its pledge to set up an Islamic administration in the country if they could, by some miracle, dethrone the BN.

Their observations are based on the current parliamentary domination of the BN. During the 1995 election, the ruling national front coalition won 162 out of 192 parliamentary seats, while the rest went to the opposition or independent candidates. Subsequent events increased the BN's seats to 166 at present.

PAS currently has only eight parliamentary seats, six of which were won in Kelantan and one in Terengganu in 1995. The party won the Arau seat in a by-election in July last year.

On the other hand, UMNO, the dominant party in BN, controls 95 parliamentary seats, including 89 which were won in 1995. Six more seats, all from Kelantan, went to Umno upon the cross-over of S46 elected representatives following the dissolution of the party in October 1996.

However, Umno lost one of its seats when its Permatang Pauh MP, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who was also its deputy president was expelled from the party a day after he was relieved of his posts as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in September last year.

According to a lecturer with the History Department of Universiti Malaya (UM), Assoc Prof Datuk Mahadzir Mohd Khir, statistically speaking, PAS needs to win at least 97 seats, or 89 more seats from what it has now, in order for it to win the next election with a simple majority.

For a two-third majority, PAS needs to win at least 128 seats, or 120 more from what it has now.

The seat-sharing formula between the main opposition parties would mean that PAS, DAP and KeAdilan would have to win 64 seats each. Thus, PAS will have to obtain another 56 seats, apart from retaining its current eight seats for it to fulfill its pledges.

Mahadzir said, based on the calculation and logic, it would be a miracle for PAS to secure so many additional seats.

He is also skeptical that PAS' ambition to set up an Islamic rule would materialise even if it could perform miraculously well by winning more than half of the 192 parliamentary seats this time around. This is mainly because the party would have to obtain the consent of the opposition front first, particularly the DAP, which has repeatedly stated its opposition to such an idea.

Moreover, without securing a two-third majority in parliament, PAS would never be able to amend the Federal Constitution to facilitate the

setting up of an Islamic state.

In fact, even if PAS could command the two-third majority, it would still have to abide by the existing provisions in the Constitution on the need to secure the consent of the Malay Rulers who are also the custodians of Islam in their respective states, before an Islamic rule can be enforced.

Head of the Media Studies Department of the UM, Assoc Prof Datuk Abdul Latif Bakar said despite its enthusiasm, PAS would not find it easy to capture Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis because of its own limitation and current performance in the respective states.

He said miscalculation and overzealousness could prove fatal to PAS as it could lose its hold on Kelantan to BN because the state was captured by the opposition party in 1990 and retained in 1995 while it was still collaborating with the now-disbanded S46.

In the 1995 election, PAS managed to secure 24 out of the 43 state assembly seats, while 12 went to S46 which was then led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who was recently appointed the state Umno liaison chief. The rest of the seats went to the BN, that is, six to Umno and one to MCA.

When S46 was dissolved, BN's strength was increased to 17 seats after the cross-over of 10 S46 assemblymen. Two other ex-S46 assemblymen, from Tendong and Kelaburan, however, joined PAS.

PAS could also be too optimistic with its future in the other states. Based on the outcome of the 1995 election, the party only managed to win seven out of 32 state seats in Terengganu, two out of 36 seats in Kedah and none of the 15 seats in Perlis.

Nevertheless, Abdul Latif did not rule out the possibility that the recent political developments involving several issues like Anwar's expulsion, could invoke some sympathy from among the voters which would ultimately benefit PAS in the form of a few extra state and parliamentary seats during the coming election.

But still, he said, the BN with its vast political experience could negate such a possibility through the on-going ceramahs or last minute offensive to counter all the allegations and claims by PAS.

The BN Member of Parliament for Parit Buntar, Encik Abdul Rahman Sulaiman, too is not convinced with the capability of PAS and said that if the party wished to secure a simple majority in Parliament in the coming election, it would have to beat all the Umno candidates in the peninsular, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and all the other Malay cabinet ministers.

This is because most of the Umno seats in the peninsular are Malay-majority areas.

Abdul Rahman is also skeptical over the partnership forged by the opposition parties, especially between PAS and KeAdilan led by Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail.

What would happen in the coming polls, he said, is that the three Malay-based parties -- Umno, PAS and KeAdilan -- would fight it out in Malay-majority constituencies which would split up the Malay votes.

He also denied PAS allegation that Umno's policies are secular when Umno's constitution itself states clearly the party's struggle to uphold Islam and this can be attested by its excellent records on the religion.

The Islam pursued by UMNO is a balance between advancement in the present world and the demand of the hereafter, while the "Islamic rule" bandied about by PAS in Kelantan has remained a slogan to fish for votes.

Umno Surepem Council member Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam agreed with Abdul Rahman and said that PAS has, to date, failed to fulfil its pledge to make Kelantan a model Islamic state.

Mohd Ali who is deputy health minister said what is clear now is that

the PAS administration is no different from the government led by Umno.

Rather, he said, Umno has never deviated from its responsibilities to incorporate Islamic law into the national administrative system, in accordance with Islam as the official religion of the country.

He said what is planned by PAS, KeAdilan dan DAP is not to create an Islamic government but rather an alternative government to serve their own respective political interest.

In this respect, he warned the people, especially Muslims, to be wary of the moves of PAS and not to gamble their future on a party with weak and conflicting policies. -- Bernama

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