

Pas gets shot in arm

Nst 25 MAR 2001

PAS will almost certainly consider this week's ruling by the Council of Rulers that organisations can use the word Islam in their names as a victory

Conditions notwithstanding the ruling spares Pas the need to drop the word Islam used in its name — Parti Islam SeMalaysia (Pan Malaysian Islamic Party)

The Rulers set several conditions for the use of the word by organisations political or otherwise

By setting conditions the Rulers hope that the word will not be misused to confuse the people more so in the manner that will mislead them from their *akidah* — belief in God

Umno on the other hand may not be totally pleased with the ruling although the outcome is not entirely unexpected. The party has for years been demanding that Pas be restrained from freely using the name Islam to confuse Malay voters

It has been the subject of heated debate at the party's annual general assembly for more than a decade

The Rulers have taken a middle path between Umno's demand for a decision that would force Pas to drop its Islamic title and the unbridled use of the word for political gains

The target of Umno's complaint is not so much the use of the word Islam but the manner in which it is used to imply that Islam and Pas are one and the same

Umno itself often claims to be an Islamic party as the majority of its members are Muslim

Pas on the other hand has denied the allegation that it uses Islam to confuse the voters into supporting it. But in reality Pas freely and openly exploits its Islamic brand. It has for decades been planting the idea in the minds of the Malays that Pas and Islam are one and the same

So much so that a lot of its grassroots supporters consider themselves better Muslims and Umno supporters are either outright *kafir* (infidels/disbelievers) or their faith in Allah is questionable

A CLASSIC example of the party's tacit approval of the stance was the *kempen teriak* or the weeping campaign carried out by its *muslimat* (woman members) starting with the 1969 general election

They would visit the homes of Umno members and supporters and on the pretext of saving the faith of fellow Muslims they wept, performed the prayer and recited the *doa* (extolling Allah for His grace and guidance)

The method worked wonderfully among

the less educated rural Malays and had since been used in many variations to spook the Malays

Its campaigners openly portray Pas as the saviour and even claim that one's passage to heaven is better assured if he or she votes for the party

Pre-empting the Council's ruling the head of the party's council of clerics, Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, who is also the Kelantan Menteri Besar, last week said that not all Pas supporters will go to heaven — only the good ones

The hard part is not so much making the ruling. The Rulers were guided by the National Fatwa Council in arriving at the decision. The hard part is ensuring that it is respected. While there are already provisions in the *syariah* laws to ensure compliance, the big question mark is: Who will do the policing?

Certainly not Umno because it is an interested party. And self-policing by Pas may not be effective because for decades it has been using its Islamic branding to the hilt

But limiting the use of the word Islam by Pas will not do much for Umno unless it

In reality, Pas freely and openly exploits its Islamic brand. It has for decades been planting the idea in the minds of the Malays that Pas and Islam are one and the same

improves itself. It is widely accepted that Pas won more seats in the 1999 general election by default because Umno was weak

PAS (or should it be PIS — Parti Islam SeMalaysia) has many faces. The political face, the religious face and more recently the liberal face. The party has become extremely good at adopting strategies and stances that guarantee maximum benefit with minimum effort

Even the non-Malays now believe that Pas is more open-minded and tolerant. There is no denying that Pas is displaying a more liberal image

Its willingness to cooperate with the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP) is seen by a lot of non-Malays as a sign of its growing liberalism

While the extent of its openness is still too early to be determined, what is certain is the fact that it has liberalised its method of influencing the voters

Having successfully taken advantage of the problems in Umno to split the Malay vote, Pas sees a better chance of victory by extending the olive branch to the non-Ma-

OTHER THOTS

By A Kadir Jasin

lays and non-Muslims

To do this, it deliberately liberalised its vote-catching method, starting with the 1999 general election. Confident of its hold on the Malay voters, the party went about soliciting the support of the non-Malays by using the DAP and Parti Keadilan Nasional as conduits

It has to be acknowledged that it was a successful strategy. While improving its own strength in Parliament and State legislative assemblies, it conceded very little to its coalition partners. In fact, it did considerable harm to the DAP, which was shunned by the Chinese voters

Although it did not succeed in attracting sufficient non-Malay votes to the opposition front, it did, however, open their eyes to a new possibility — a second multi-racial coalition

Of course, Pas wants nothing less than a

dominant role in the coalition — one which supersedes Umno's position in the Barisan Nasional. Pas leaders are aware that anything less than absolute control of the coalition is unacceptable to its generally rural and less tolerant Malays

A point to note is the *Pas baru* (the new Pas) is represented by a growing number of non-*ulama*. They are fully aware of what images can do for a political party in an era dominated by the popular Press and television

Hence it is not an accident that Pas Members of Parliament and State Assemblies are trading the *baju Melayu* (Malay traditional dress) and the Arab *jubah* (robe) for colour-coordinated coats and ties. They look dapper and modern

As they venture further south and away from the Malay heartlands into the more ethnically mixed areas, they know that a more universal image is important — hence the new look

They no longer drive around in beat-up cars. They are being chauffeur-driven in State cars and brand-new four-wheel-drive vehicles

from ruling

They are right. A growing number of non Malays are beginning to think that Pas has changed. They even overlook the insult Pas heaped on the DAP in the recent Lunas by election when it sided with Keadilan in relieving the Chinese based party of the seat on grounds that a Malay candidate stood a better chance of winning.

Although Keadilan's Malay candidate won the seat for the opposition front, the DAP's pride and image suffered a major blow.

Pas claims that it has no problem working with the DAP although the latter is essentially a Chinese party. Here Pas could very well be telling the truth.

While claiming its Islamic ascendancy, Pas has made it clear that it does not recognise people by race. Theologically, it has no choice but to categorise the people into *orang Islam* (the Muslims) and *orang kafir*. The term non Muslim is inapplicable in strict theological sense. This may very well be acceptable to some non Malays, in particular those who begrudge the Malays the privileges they enjoy.

Under Pas there will no longer be Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans and Kadazans. There will only be the believers (the Muslims) and disbelievers (the *kafir*).

It is for the very same reason that Pas accuses Umno of being un-Islamic because it is ethnically based and it espouses Malay nationalism, which Pas considers *assa biyah* (tribal) and hence against the teaching of Islam.

A READER who is an ethnic Indian but would like to be known as Apache (full name and telephone number given) wrote: I agree with you in that the ISA (Internal Security Act) is the only tool that can be used effectively to contain racial issues in which the parties and people involved have lost all sense of reasoning. I do not know why Yijun (Woo) is so angry with you for expressing such a sensible suggestion.

Commenting on the incidents in Jalan Klang Lama, he in part said: In a recent *theru koothu* (street drama), one (Indian) leader openly admitted that the Indians are downtrodden and that he came to know about the caste system only in the 1970s.

It was when he was expelled from his party that he started using the caste system to promote the formation of a new party.

When leaders brand a community downtrodden, what can you expect from that community? In Malaysia, it is a sin to call any one downtrodden. Immigrants from neighbouring countries came here with nothing and over a short period took

control of one or two industries. Who is stopping the so-called downtrodden from dominating these industries?

Some Indian based parties existed only during elections and their leaders appeared only during communal troubles. If anything good happens, they claim credit. By the same token, the same leaders should come forward to admit guilt when something bad happens.

I hope you can put this message in the proper perspective for the leaders to come forward and admit that they let the Malaysian Indians down.

Reader Suseela G. Seenivasagam of Petaling Jaya has this to say in her e-mail to me: I have always loved Malaysia and proudly speak of Malaysia to my other family members who have settled down overseas. Our country is a peace loving country with no natural catastrophes and I admire Dr Mahathir for what he has done for our country.

As a mother of four, there is nothing more important to me than peace and unity and knowing that my children are safe on their way to school and back. I am someone who applauds the severe action of our police force and the ISA is one of the best laws that our country has. Democracy is fine but not to the extent that people start doing as they like in public.

The recent clashes are an event which have made me so sad. How can this happen in our country? Though I am an Indian and I am very strong in my religion, I have always had the utmost respect for other people's belief and faith.

I am someone who has always had friends of mixed race because I consider myself a Malaysian first and an Indian second. I hate being racist and I hate people who go round claiming superiority of their religion. Ours is a multi-racial community and we have to learn to respect one another's culture, heritage and existence. These are values which I have taught my children from young and they too know that they are Malaysians.

Ours is a country which is so beautiful in every way and I have foreign friends who tell me how lucky we are to be living in Malaysia. Why can't we appreciate this, be patriotic and work together in every way we can to build our nation?

One last word to our oppositions: Don't forget that you are also living in Malaysia and any unrest that you may create can indirectly put your sons or daughters in harm's way. There is nothing more important than a peaceful environment where we can sleep at night.

□ akadirjasin@bertapub.com.my