

21/08/2001

A new realism has dawned for Pas, DAP?

Abdullah Ahmad

THE idea of DAP consorting with Pas without a parting of the ways sooner than expected suggests a lack of understanding of Malaysian realpolitik. I hope for DAP and Pas, a new realism has dawned, a bitter lesson well-learned.

In their obsession to oust the Barisan Nasional Government and humiliate Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, everything became relative to both parties: to DAP, the ultra Malay-Islamists in Pas were handsome, good and dependable, and to the foxy mullahs, DAP could not be anti-Islam nor Malay. Their leaders came to pay tribute and embrace them in their well-entrenched ramparts in Kelantan and Terengganu. It has and is a heady time for Pas' strategists, tacticians and even the hardliners and the fanatical and militant activists: the Chinese mountain has come to Pas' Muhammad.

For DAP, it was an opportunity not to be passed: to sleep with Pas. Partly, it came about courtesy of the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim affair. DAP suffered and Pas hugely profited from the dalliance.

For sure, DAP and Pas, until 1999, were historically deeply antagonistic towards each other. Like Umno, Pas was suspicious, it disliked and distrusted DAP's political ploy of "Malaysian Malaysia". Pas was founded in 1951 to disunite the Malays then fighting for Merdeka. Pas wanted to delay Merdeka until Malaysians were ready to support its national Islamic theocratic ideology.

Then both parties decided (in what then appeared as a political coup for the Islamists and DAP) to achieve detente, a rapprochement; to forget the past and embrace a new beginning.

They formed an Opposition Front together with Anwar's infant Parti Keadilan Nasional and the long-time also-ran Parti Rakyat. DAP, the leader of the pack, sought to maximise its leverage over its "junior partners" and, thereby, preserve a central DAP role in the front. Pas waited for a time which came too soon.

Pas was (and make no mistake, is) not as naive as DAP thought. The heart of its policy has always been to enter into any alliance, like the communists, as long as the coalition can advance its brand of political Islam.

It remains the party's diplomacy - even it is rather overtly - to manipulate any alliance to its advantage. Umno discovered it when Pas was in the BN fraternity in early and mid-70s. Tun Abdul Razak managed to outwit it, but his successor Tun Hussein Onn could not cope. Pas was kicked out of the alliance in 1978.

While DAP considers its next move, I am not altogether surprised, well haven't I said so time and again in this column, that Pas, come what may, will go it alone in its pursuit of its burning desire to set up an Islamic theocratic nation?

Datuk Seri Hadi Awang, Pas' powerful deputy president and the party's radical ideologue (also Menteri Besar of Terengganu), has confirmed what I have been saying all along. Thank You Tuan Guru for stating it unequivocally for the umpteenth time that Pas' political objective remains unchanged nor negotiable. DAP was foolish to be lullabied.

You are right in fact and history. Pas won Kelantan and Terengganu in 1999 through its own strength and a separate manifesto specially written for the two Malay states. After all, Pas had done it in 1959, long before DAP was formed following the separation of Singapore from Malaysia 36

years ago.

Lim Kit Siang, now joined by his able and perhaps more perceptive son, Guan Eng (vice-chairman), still calls the shots in DAP whatever title DAP bestows upon him. He founded the party and he shall lead it until his last breath. He deserves the trust and confidence of the party delegates and the central executive committee which elected him and Guan Eng.

I believe, without Kit Siang and Guan Eng, DAP will be history post-haste. Pas has entrenched itself, it shall lead the Opposition for a long time.

After Pas and DAP came together, I realised for the first time that DAP might not remain the first choice of many Malaysian Chinese votes in the 1999 general election. I was right as were you. The marriage of convenience will never work; it can't because their ideologies are poles apart, competing and conflicting sine qua non.

Were I a Chinese, I will never forgive DAP for betraying its core supporters simply for political expediency. What Pas has done is not untypical in politics: it borrows DAP's pot to cook DAP's goose in!

I mustn't say I am pleased but I think Pas has got DAP boxed in. If MCA and Gerakan work hard and smart, they can decapitate DAP in 2004.

Two years ago, the Chinese voters largely withheld their support, either by voting MCA, Gerakan and Umno or abstaining. Kit Siang and Karpal Singh were banished from Parliament. Now, DAP can even lose whatever is left of the electoral support.

A Chinese friend told me yesterday that the Chinese community is unlikely to forget easily DAP's tryst with the detestable Pas; it's like a Jew taking an Arab mistress and vice-versa. DAP's indiscretion is a cardinal sin in the eyes of the Chinese.

DAP's procrastination about leaving the Opposition Front despite Pas' unequivocal and unconciliatory statement: a Syariah-ruled Malaysia is the goal, I believe, will not go down well on the ground.

Kit Siang should take a pause, make a cool judgment as to whether or not DAP is likely to recover much in 2004 given his fatal miscalculation to sleep on the same bed with Hadi. I know he will not heed this, he is too fascinated with politics even though it has not been a wise strategem.

In judging a politician, it is important to understand what his self-image is. Throughout his years in the Dewan Rakyat, Kit Siang came out as too combative and authoritative. He has always prided himself as a brave warrior; he was. A former DAP stalwart told me: "The whole trouble with Kit Siang is he thinks he has muscular intellect when in fact his is modest. He is no Lee Kuan Yew though he seems to think he is."

The Pas episode no doubt has traumatised him, yet the elated Pas' reaction to DAP conciliatory remarks and appeals, should summon enough courage for him to take DAP out of the Opposition Front to be on its own again.

I do urge him to resist the bunker mentality which unfortunately afflicts all long-serving leaders, by making DAP a genuine multi-racial party. DAP cannot ignore the Bumiputeras which form 60 per cent of the population, and who are the Bumiputera leaders in the party?

DAP commentary on Malaysian politics shows scant understanding of the deep, unshakeable and unbreakable linkage between race and religion.

Until that is understood, it has become evident to me that DAP will never have a multi-racial house. No party can succeed if it isolates the majority race, nor can a Malay party prosper without support from the other half of the Malaysian population.

The party which has succeeded and will triumph in future is the one which enjoys the confidence of the holders of most of the Malaysian values.

They are what I call middle Malaysians who advocate morality, revere racial harmony and peace; resent and condemn religious and cultural intolerance.

(END)