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An inevitable divorce

Abdullah Ahmad

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PAS only agreed to co-operate with the DAP because it did not - so it appears - initially oppose the formation of a scrupulously Islamic theocratic state should the Barisan Alternatif win the 1999 general election. To its credit, Pas never did, and never will, deceive its present and future partners into believing that the establishment of a scrupulously Islamic theocratic Malaysian nation is negotiable.

This is all predictable enough. This was and is what I have tried to knock into DAP skulls from the beginning, but to no avail.

DAP, in its moments of grand delusion, must have thought it could impose its will on Pas. Pas, I know, is stronger than DAP, and its leaders told me: "We are strong and we shall do what we want. DAP can take it or leave it."

That was the state until last Saturday. How could DAP have allowed itself to be duped? It still baffles me.

It was not altogether unexpected that the Pas-DAP wedlock of convenience, rather than the matrimony of true minds, should have ended in divorce. It has, as I have always said it would, in this column.

It was a union between committed conservative Islamists and insupportable Chinese and Indian secularists. DAP should consider this divorce a blessing in disguise if it is forgiven by the Malaysian Chinese and Indians whom it had pawned to Pas in its greed to share power with the Islamic theological leadership.

Pas and DAP have always been ideologically incompatible, although they decided to ignore their wide differences when both, along with two minor partners - Parti Keadilan Nasional and Parti Rakyat - formed the Barisan Alternatif, an imitation of the long-standing Barisan Nasional (BN), just before the last general election in a vain attempt to wrest power from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The DAP was originally the People's Action Party (PAP) when Singapore was briefly in Malaysia. When Singapore quit the federation, PAP became the DAP (Democratic Action Party).

The DAP thrived until it embraced Pas on exploiting the gut issues of the Chinese community from whom it derives its main support to get and sustain its political sine qua non.

Outside and inside the coalition, I know there have been wide differences in the interpretation of the spirit and substance of the Malaysia each member wants and cherishes.

DAP tamely tried to peddle its distorted and stale version of a Malaysian Malaysia; even downplaying it to please Pas as to what kind of nation Malaysia should be under Pas.

Pas wants DAP to give it a carte blanche to deal with the political positions of each community, pledging to abide by Islamic rules of fair play.

Pas was and is shrewd. While it tells the Malays in towns and kampungs that their special rights and privileges have diminished under Umno, it misleads the DAP into believing that the non-Malay rights and positions will be protected, and will not be allowed to be challenged.

It took 22 months for DAP stalwarts, who have described themselves as experienced politicians, to realise they had been made suckers by Pas.

They became equally disillusioned over their prospects in the opposition front and in the new country of Islamic Malaysia.

DAP realises, perhaps too late, that Pas will never shift from its avowed political statement: it will do whatever it takes for the idea of an "Islamic theocratic Malaysian state". This is a situation which the non-Malays will not tolerate; it is something with which few non-Muslims can agree.

Keadilan and Parti Rakyat also oppose an Islamic theocratic Malaysian state and DAP is expected to persuade them to join it in a new pact to isolate Pas and to take on the BN under a new banner in 2004.

I feel sorry for the DAP. It is going to be an uphill task to regain the confidence of Chinese voters who deserted it in 1999 when, against the Chinese national grain, it teamed up with Pas to topple the BN.

The question is, can the Chinese trust the party which has committed such a big political blunder? I suggest the DAP is still longing to return to Pas' breast at an appropriate time. The divorce is not final.

This is only the first talaq or talaq Raj'e, and it is revocable. Under Islamic law, reconciliation is permissible before the iddah (three normal menstruating cycles) is completed; the couple need not marry again.

It's only when triple divorce has been pronounced (ba'in kubra) that there can be no reconciliation. The woman has to marry another person, be divorced and wait out the iddah before she can remarry the previous husband.

In any case, DAP and Pas can always continue to see each other secretly and out of wedlock. And they will do just this.

In 44 years of independence, 1974 produced the best year in political terms. The BN scored a landslide victory (which was followed subsequently for a number of years). Tun Razak led a nine-party coalition to this resounding victory. The electorate gave a massive endorsement to BN for its multi-racial policies. Pas was seduced by Tun Razak to be a leading member of the BN.

Even then Pas was wily. But a craftier leader was in charge. Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, not an uncunning politician with long years of experience, was tortuously outmanoeuvred by Pas during the Pas-Semangat 46 coalition.

Pas is like a Communist party. It will never be able to co-exist with any other party for long because of the strong polarisation of ideologies. It must always lead. The year 1974 was an exception. It was biding its time.

Pas, according to Tunku Abdul Rahman, "is a party which bases its politics on narrow racial and religious beliefs...". When Pas was formed in 1951 by Haji Ahmad Fuad Hassan, a former senior leader of Umno, Tunku offered Pas six seats in the Alliance Party's central executive committee if it would join the Alliance to fight for independence. Fuad declined, and Pas won a seat in the pre-independence general election in 1955.

Make no mistake. Pas is a conservative religious party, it shall always exist unless banned. It has seen near disaster (in 1978) but has climbed back into acceptance by conservative Malays and is believed to be expanding in some areas.

In the 1999 general election, only Pas performed impressively. But the result was a disaster for DAP, while Umno suffered reverses which can be recovered if it has the political will to do what must be done. BN will win in 2004, come what may.

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