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Pas-DAP wedlock collapses

IT was naive for anyone to think that a political marriage between Pas and DAP would have lasted. What is surprising is that it had even taken place. Indeed, what is surprising is that the charade of a partnership between the religious scholars of Pas and the secular champions of DAP would have lasted 22 months. For a time, they managed to hoodwink the gullible that their so-called "Barisan Alternatif" would really be a viable alternative to the Barisan Nasional. But they have been exposed as a fragile gathering of political opportunists with the withdrawal of the DAP from the Opposition coalition, which also includes Keadilan and PRM.

Seasoned politicians and rational Malaysians had all along warned of the short-term expediency and opportunism underlying the formation of the opposition coalition which was hastily put together in 1999 to fight the Barisan Nasional in the general election. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had predicted the collapse because "no marriage between incompatibles can last long." Given the wide gulf between the political platforms of the two parties, the only factor that brought them together in their unworkable alliance was their common hatred for the Barisan Nasional Government led by Umno.

In their quest for power, Pas and DAP were willing to trade their basic principles. Any edifice built on a weak foundation will collapse. And this is what happened to the Pas-DAP alliance whose break-up will weaken the Opposition coalition. DAP leaders will have plenty to explain to their rank and file who had believed that the pact with Pas was the dawn of a bright new era as it could begin to shed its mainly Chinese image by the alliance with a Malay-Muslim party. The DAP leadership would also have to live with the fact that the failure of its alliance with Pas has proven right those in the party who had long been apprehensive and uneasy of such an alliance. But being right is no consolation when the pact with Pas has eroded support for the party.

DAP is hoping that by pulling out of the Opposition coalition and disassociating itself from the Islamic theocratic state advocated by Pas, it can regain the support of the Chinese voters who abandoned it in droves in the last general election. But it would not be easy. The people will still harbour suspicion of the DAP's motives in trying to woo them back to its fold. The electorate would have seen by now, if they had not already seen it before, the short-sightedness and opportunism of the DAP in willing to ignore the Chinese electorate's deep-seated fears of living under an Islamic theocratic state if Pas manages to come to power with the support of DAP and the other coalition partners. The voters were wise in rejecting DAP's politics and shifting their support to the Barisan Nasional. DAP has now become wiser in leaving the Opposition coalition but only after it was taught a bitter lesson in the last general election when it misjudged its mainly Chinese base and went for the pact with Pas, and suffered heavy defeats.

For Malaysians, DAP's pullout from the Opposition coalition carries a timely reminder. Despite its imperfections, the Barisan Nasional remains the only viable hope for Malaysia because of its proven track record of accommodation, co-operation and power sharing among the various races. Understanding Malaysian politics requires an appreciation of realism. DAP and Pas failed here.

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