

24/07/2001

The great divorce is now at hand

Abdullah Ahmad

SO they all rolled over and one fell out; there were four in the bed when there should have been only three. DAP really ought to quit the opposition alliance which in the first place beggars belief. The Chinese based and led party does not believe in an Islamic puritanical theocratic state. Did it matter? No. what was more important in 1999 was the temporary coalition of political ambitions.

Very soon, the BN copycat Barisan Alternatif will be left only with three Malay-based and led parties: Pas, Keadilan and Parti Rakyat. Then two, after Parti Rakyat is absorbed by Keadilan.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed, like Lee Kuan Yew and Jiang Zemin, has always cited the importance of political stability over everything. As a result on a post-colonial map where poverty, corruption and human rights abuses have waged an endless war of attrition on vision, Malaysia and Singapore stand out.

Nations which have obtusely adopted the Western political model - The Philippines and Indonesia are good examples. While they enjoy freedom and "democracy" their people are poor; the countries are politically unstable and their economies are in a state of chaos.

In contrast, we and Singapore though democratic are prosperous, stable, and developing faster than any other Asian nation because both nations are ruled by patriarchal leaders with visionary idealism who were and are driven by a desire to create new, progressive societies.

Only the Almighty could have helped us had the Opposition, bizarrely-arranged, won the last general election. It didn't.

As widely predicted, the marriage of convenience would not last and it is now on the brink. The final stage of the DAP-Pas divorce is about to occur. Soon enough, DAP and Pas will go their separate ways.

I do not believe Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh will be able to resolve the irreconcilable ideological differences with the uncompromising Pas leaders and the unappeasable mullahs.

The fervently fanatical Islamists have always believed that it's their destiny to rule Malaysia, scrupulously according to Quranic tenets and the sayings of the Prophet. Their aim is the crucial issue, beside which all other issues pale. A total imposition of Syariah law and that the ultimate power rests with the ulama is not negotiable.

Malaysians may think Pas and its followers are deluding themselves if they think the electorate at large - the non-Malays and moderate Malays - is desperate enough to turn to their puritanical Islamic vision.

For sure, there are enough Malaysians who have higher priorities just now than taking the hypothetical position on the notional prophet of a puritanical Islamic theocratic nation.

Pas has run Kelantan for the most part of 44 years since Merdeka, and now Terengganu. By contrast, DAP has never ever run anything, not even a local council.

The only hope of solid and lasting peace between DAP and Pas is separation. The Opposition Alliance began with hopes, I always thought, unrealistically high, but for Pas and Keadilan the co-operation with DAP and the minute Parti Rakyat represented a big advance.

For DAP it was disaster and catastrophe. The Chinese voters punished the party mercilessly by abandoning it because of its opportunistic volte-face when it decided on co-operation with the Islamists and mullahs.

Pas which has gone through the baptism of fire is now convinced more than ever that its version of Islam is the only way forward for Malaysia.

I do fear, I really do, that if the Pas hardliners find the democratic means to convert Malaysia too cumbersome and too slow for their liking they will opt for Algerian-style jihad.

DAP must withdraw from the Pas-led and dominated Opposition Front for good, and leave its future to the Malay-based parties. Pas has given DAP and its ilk a clear message about what it prefers and whom it embraces.

DAP should now go it alone and be itself again. It can't go on being a Pas poodle. Now that DAP has finally woken up, it should find ways to make up for its failure to bark earlier.

Umno and BN will attempt to bury Pas intellectually and electorally by making the ancient religious dogma known to the young electorate and the voters who do not know it.

In the next general election, the party which deserves to win will be the one that can successfully enthuse and capture the imagination of a wide range of Malaysians.

The battle between Umno and Pas has really begun in earnest. Pas' challenge is to persuade Malaysians, not just Malays, that it is not an extremist party, that it can be trusted even by the infidels (what a task).

For the ruling party the task is to persuade everyone that it has cleansed itself. It must be able to flesh out interesting ideas and policies on education, economy, health, law and order, and present the electorate with candidates of substance as potential ministers, leaders, legislators and guardians of peace and justice.

The country can contemplate the scale of challenge that lies ahead if Pas wins. I do not believe Pas will emerge a viable force at the next election, but there is an urgent need for Umno to think seriously of all these who refused to endorse BN at the polls in 1999.

If it does it may well point the way to a recovery and a resilient future.

(END)