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Unity talks: Pas showing its negative side

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THE Malay proverb diberi betis nak peha (give an inch, demands a foot) best describes Pas' attitude towards the Umno-initiated Malay unity talks.

From the day Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad broached the idea of a meeting between him and Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor, Umno has been accommodating in meeting Pas' demands and conditions.

The chronology of events shows Umno's consistency in wanting the talks while demonstrating Pas' unwillingness to meet.

First, in between welcoming the idea, Pas threatened it would not participate unless the scope of discussions was expanded to include national unity. How wrong it was in thinking that Umno would not agree to the conditions, therefore sinking the idea even before it could get started.

Dr Mahathir stressed repeatedly that Umno would go to the meeting with an open mind, arguing that while it wanted to give priority to discussing Malay unity, any discussion on national unity would not be rejected.

This sent Pas scurrying for another reason to scuttle the talks. It found this in the form of four new conditions that it believed Umno would find hard to fulfil.

Pas secretary-general Nasharuddin Mat Isa, thrust suddenly into the limelight when he was given the responsibility to iron out any problems concerning the talks with Umno, announced four issues that the party wanted to be highlighted. There were on the judiciary, religion, economy and federalism.

Pas sincerely believed Umno would not be able to accommodate any or all four demands. Imagine their horror when Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob announced that the party was willing to discuss any topic, squeezing them into a corner, where the only escape was by designing other means of deception.

Devoid of any shame and acting like children who are keen on demanding this and that, Fadzil declared after a three-hour meeting of its central working committee last week that the party had found the atmosphere for any meeting between the two parties no longer conducive.

He blamed it partly on police action against Opposition members taking part in illegal assemblies in Kuala Lumpur and Kulim, Kedah, saying such action must be stopped.

For the talks to take place, he said two main conditions must be fulfilled. These are restoring permission for its party organ, Harakah, to be published twice weekly from the current two times a month, and the Terengganu petroleum royalty issue.

Another condition relates to the use of Islam in Pas' name. Noted an Umno leader: "Certain groups in Pas are bent on derailing the talks. They don't want it to happen, they feel Pas has nothing to gain.

"That's why we are seeing new conditions being laid out. The party leadership is divided into two groups - one for the talks and the other against it."

Asked to identify Pas leaders who did not want the talks to take place, he said it involved the "young Turks", with backing from several of its national leaders.

It is no secret that Pas Youth chief Mahfuz Omar has vehemently opposed the idea of a round-table discussion between leaders of Umno and his party.

A political observer notes that even if Umno is able to fulfil the latest demands, albeit some of them are under the purview of the Barisan Nasional Government and not Umno alone, there is nothing to stop Pas from coming up with new conditions.

"The party has shown its inconsistency ... who is to guarantee that it will come to the negotiating table if its latest demands are met? Only the party can answer this."

"Kalau hendak seribu daya, tak hendak seribu dalih. (If there is a will, there is a way). It looks pretty clear now that Pas is the one which is berdalih (finding excuses)."

If Pas is sincere in wanting to meet Umno and thrash out problems affecting unity among the Malays, he feels it would strive to make the talks materialise.

This can be achieved by the party adopting Umno's attitude: Come to the meeting with an open mind. No meetings would be successful if one side chooses to dictate terms.

Terms and conditions should be presented during, not before, any meeting, with both parties striving towards reaching an amicable solution.

If this is not possible, then the unresolved matters should be discussed again at the next meeting. This should be the way in solving issues, not like the approach adopted by Pas. If all outstanding issues have been resolved before the meeting, there is no need for Pas to attend the unity talks anymore.

Pas says it champions Islam but when it comes to the talks, its actions have actually tarnished the good name of the religion. Who is to be blamed if the non-Muslims were to regard to Islam as an intolerable and unreasonable religion when Pas clearly demonstrates these negative elements in its dealings with Umno?

What they see in Pas is a party that has no qualms about breaking promises and making unreasonable demands. The problem is that they might equate Pas with Islam, and if this is the case, there is no need to elaborate on the negative consequences.