

05/03/2004

'Keadilan is no longer a force to be reckoned with'

Shukor Rahman

PARTI Keadilan is a sinking ship and the coming election may well be its swan song, says veteran writer and politician Kassim Ahmad.

Kassim, 70, who was born in Bukit Pinang, Kedah, was the national chairman of Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaya (PSRM) for 18 years.

He told the NST in Penang that "Keadilan was no longer a force to reckon with and had only a small hardcore group of loyalists".

"It looks as if Keadilan is finished. It has no ideology and no policy except Anwarism, and Anwar (Ibrahim) is no longer a hot issue."

Kassim said it was a blunder for Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) to have merged with Keadilan and it would have been better for PRM to pursue its left-wing ideology and carry on the struggle against American hegemony and neo-colonialism.

He said that initially some had underestimated the capability of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, but now many had been won over by his fight against corruption and his efforts to cut bureaucratic red tape.

The rakyat, he said, should also remember that it was Pak Lah who swung Sabah over to the Barisan side in 1999 when even leaders like Anwar had failed to do so earlier.

Kassim predicted that BN has a fighting chance of recapturing Trengganu and also retaining Kedah.

"The Malay support for Pas in Kedah has reached its peak and can only wane. Pas has no issues this time and can only promise that its supporters will go to heaven!"

BN, he said, may find the going tougher in Kelantan unless State Umno leaders stop their squabbling.

Kassim does not see the DAP making a strong impression as it has also run out of major issues.

"Pak Lah is already tackling corruption and Chinese education is an old issue and no longer valid. The economy is also generally good," he said.

He hopes Pak Lah will usher in a spirit of musyawarah (consultation) as evident during the premiership of the late Tunku Abdul Rahman and the late Tun Abdul Razak. Kassim revealed that both Tun Razak and later Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had tried to bring PSRM leaders into the Barisan fold.

"There was always a dogmatic group with its rigid interpretation of ideology which stood in the way of this possibility," he said.

He recalled that during its heyday, Parti Rakyat had spell-binding orators such as the late Ahmad Boestamam, Datuk Kampo Radjo, Zulkifli Ismail and Omar Othman.

Many aspects of the party's struggle, he said, had ultimately become part of national policies especially in foreign affairs, education, and economy.

"There has been a lot of progress over the years and Malaysia today is comparable to many advanced countries," he said.

Kassim was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for five years from 1976 to 1981. But he can still chuckle about it and says he bore no grudges against Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, who was then Home Affairs Minister.

"There is no point bearing a grudge as you go through life," he said.

Kassim contested several national elections but was unsuccessful. Today he does not miss the excitement at all. He left PSRM in 1984 and joined

Umno two years later. He has written 17 books over the years.