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Pas move unacceptable and dangerous

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SEVERAL parties have already launched campaigns to inform their members and supporters why Pas' idea of an Islamic state must be rejected.

The political parties representing the Chinese community have finally become united on a national issue.

However, the reaction from the Malay and Muslim communities is muted. This is understandable but regrettable.

The current generation of Malays has been led to believe that to criticise the idea Pas propounds of an Islamic state or to even comment on subjects such as the introduction of the hudud system, is tantamount to a criticism of Islam itself.

There is a surprisingly widespread perception that to question the version of Islam being promoted by Pas is to question the very faith itself.

This inability or unwillingness to differentiate between matters of state and personal beliefs has arisen because of incessant demands by religious groups who aspire for political power.

To these groups, there is no separation between affairs of the state and religion. Their own peculiar system of belief subsumes everything.

This approach is not unique to the Muslim polity. Hindu-based political parties in India and Jewish political groups in Israel say the same thing; that their political systems be subservient to their religious demands.

Fortunately, there are many who still believe that to preserve the sanctity and purity of religion, it must not be allowed to be used for political expedience.

The Malay community must overcome its reluctance to get involved in so-called religious issues affecting this nation. There can never be a meaningful discourse on nation building unless this happens.

If the issue is sidestepped or a non-committal, and, presumably, politically safe stance is taken, it will lend credence to Pas and those that hold that it is on the true path.

Lest it be forgotten, our Federal Constitution is a document forging together the aspirations of different communities, and the system of government that flows from it is designed to enable those communities to achieve their aspirations together.

It is also a constitution that incorporates the established principles of the United Nations Charter and of modern nation states - thus not only bringing Malaysia within the fold of the community of nations but also assuring its citizens of basic rights which cut across religious and ethnic bounds.

For Pas to use religion as a pretext to oppose the Federal Constitution and its framework is both unacceptable and dangerous.

For the Malay and Muslim community to distance itself from the issue compounds this danger and is a disservice to Umno and those who fought and died to protect this country and its Constitution.

Umno and the Malay community should not feel ambivalent about the issue of Pas' proposed Islamic state or feel "guilty about taking a position on it".

It must be remembered that it was the Malay community and Umno, together with the MCA and MIC, representing the two other major races in the country, which fought for independence.

It was they who agreed to accept the Federal Constitution together with

the Malay Rulers and the Malay States. Sabah and Sarawak later came to embrace the Constitution.

Why then do some within Umno and the Malay community take a back seat when challenged by Pas on the issue?

Pas' version of an Islamic state may be disguised as a religious issue but it in fact threatens the very core of our nation's identity.

It is not enough that only non-Muslims oppose it, every Malaysian regardless of his religious affiliation or ethnicity must oppose it, too. Here's why.

Pas' Islamic state will permanently divide the citizenry. One set of laws and rules for Muslims and one for others.

The world saw this model of a legal system in Nazi Germany, and, more recently, in South Africa before Mandela.

Both regimes purported to base their systems on self-proclaimed religious virtues, but the result was bigotry and oppression.

Muslims must not be deluded into thinking that Pas' Islamic laws will be just and will do justice to them.

God's laws are undoubtedly just, but if interpreted and enforced by unjust politicians and their appointees, Muslims, too, will suffer.

Pas leaders have failed to prove that they have great moral fibre or compassion or a deep sense of fairness in administering two States in the Federation.

They have failed to administer these States fairly under manmade laws. How then can we expect of them to be capable and just in implementing God's laws?

Muslims in this country should never forget the suffering and injustices perpetrated by Numeri in Sudan and Zia Ul Haq in Pakistan. We should never forget that they, too, purported to implement what they considered to be Islamic laws.

Pas declares that it will observe and protect human rights as long as it does not violate the syariah. More accurately, one should read this to mean the Pas' version of the syariah.

So if you are an Umno member, your rights can be violated if Pas claims that you are not a pure Muslim. If you are a citizen wanting to exercise those basic freedoms and rights guaranteed under the present system, you would not allowed to do so if it is Pas' view that it violates the syariah.

The promise by Pas to protect human rights is akin to Henry Ford's promise to the American public on his famous Model-T - you can ask for any colour you want so long as it is black.

Pas accepts democracy as the methodology through which it would realise its political goals; but that is as far as it goes.

Democracy is seen by Pas as a way to establish and maintain a religious theocratic leadership with no respect for the democratic processes, freedom and rights of equality enshrined in our Federal Constitution.

The Pas document proclaims that the supreme leader under Pas' Islamic state would be a godfearing and virtuous Muslim. But who would decide?

In practice, only Pas members would qualify and no one else. Non-Muslims would certainly not qualify to lead. Even Umno members would be deprived of a chance. Where then is the equality among Malaysians?

Under the Pas version of an Islamic state, the Federation, as we know it, will be destroyed. Power will shift from the elected representatives to a supposedly wise religious leader.

Parliament will just be a shura, a consultative council, and the supreme wise leader will be the ultimate decision-maker - determining what is good for the country. Ayatollah Khomeini once had that privilege and power.

The constitutional protections now enjoyed by the various ethnic groups

will become ephemeral - the protection they will then have will be subject to the whims and fancies of this supreme wise leader and his attendant theocracy.

Malaysia will no longer be the Malaysia we recognise.

All Malaysians, including the Malay community, must not hesitate to oppose this attempt to usurp the power of the people.

Democracy must not be allowed to be used as a tool to kill democracy. Freedoms that our founding fathers won for us at Independence must be protected at all costs.

The prosperity that the country enjoys stems mainly from the wisdom of our founding fathers in developing a society that kept the various races together in harmony.

The foundation of such a society was the Federal Constitution that laid down a democratic system of government and enshrined fundamental liberties such as equality before the law and the freedom to practise one's religion.

Pas will succeed as long as it is able to put fear in the minds of the Malay community that to oppose its rule and policies is sinful.

The Malay community must remember that there are hundreds of millions of Muslims all over the world holding to their faith in earnest and dedication yet living in a secular state.

In pursuing its political aspirations, the Malay community must realise that a secular state is not inconsistent with the practice of Islam.

Millions of Muslims in America, Europe, India, Egypt, Turkey and China are able to live peacefully and able to practise their faiths freely because the constitutions of those countries protect religious freedom just as the Federal Constitution does in Malaysia.

Would any of them be considered less of a Muslim or less faithful in the eyes of God because there is no mullah as their leader?

Are any of them less of a Muslim because they don't have laws that segregate them from non-Muslims?

Will the 100 million Muslims in India feel better protected if India is ruled by a Hindu supreme religious leader who would have the power to decide what protection to accord them, what taxes can be levied on them?

Surely not. In fact, India can harmoniously have a Muslim president and a Hindu prime minister because India does not subscribe to Pas' idea of a religious state.

Muslims all over the world get protection from secular constitutions even when they are minorities. Shouldn't the Muslims in Malaysia, too, defend this Constitution to protect Malaysian minorities?

The rights and freedoms enshrined in the Federal Constitution were also put in place to provide a constitutional framework to give expression to the aspirations of the majority Malay community.

These constitutional safeguards have put the Malay community and Malaysia on the world map. We are known and respected.

The community's progress is the envy of many of our neighbours as well as other post-colonial nations. In 45 short years, we have become a known and respected voice in the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds.

To embrace Pas' idea of an Islamic state would not only set us back 45 years but also forfeit the opportunity given to the Malay community by our founding fathers to make our presence known in the world.

Muslims must not succumb to the emotions of the power hungry. Pas must not succeed in its attempt to politically blackmail us by using and questioning our faith.

Faith can only be measured by the Almighty and not some politician hell bent in the pursuit of political power.

We must never allow our religious beliefs and commitment to be

questioned just because we don't subscribe to Pas' fancy political ideas.

As former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has always reminded us, we are Muslims living in a Muslim country under the Federal Constitution. That should be enough.