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## The theocracy conspiracy

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LET me begin by stating that I respect truth - to see it like it is and tell it like it is. Pas, to its credit, when it comes to its overriding and uncompromising goal of establishing an Islamic theocracy in Malaysia, not only speaks the truth but desires to live the truth according to its narrow and literal interpretation of the syariah.

With its "Memorandum to the People of Malaysia", Pas has finally given us a concrete idea - apart from its fire-and-brimstone rhetoric - of what it has in mind should it come to power.

Even without such a "blueprint", its aim of creating its version of an anachronistic Islamic state was enough to scare the hell out of its former partner-in-chief in the Opposition, the Chinese-based and led DAP.

Now that the Memorandum is out, Pas' other partners in the reduced Opposition front are beginning to get a serious case of the jitters. Parti Keadilan and Parti Rakyat, squirming under the stigma of association, have threatened to "abandon" Pas in favour of less extremist brethren.

They should pull out if they are not to be caught in a bind, and thus seal their own fate. Whatever their faults, the two parties are part of the "liberal" Opposition, content to fight their causes under Malaysia's time-honoured system of parliamentary democracy rather than a jury-rigged theocracy.

There is no room for them under the Pas construct, apart from the soaking up of a few votes in a one-way ticket to victory in the elections.

In the 1999 general election, Pas was prepared to disguise enough of its true colours to forge a manifesto to get into bed with the Barisan Alternatif. After winning an unprecedented number of seats, however, the colours have shone through.

Even then, Pas theologians, the self-styled ulama who head the party, refrained from distilling their political intentions into the legibility of black and white - until, of course, they were challenged to do so by Umno.

It has taken them a year to come out with the Memorandum, which should spell out the non-Muslims' as well as moderate Muslims' worst fears.

Under the Pas gameplan, the Constitution will be "superseded" as the highest law of the land; in other words, subsumed, in still other words, abolished. The plan, therefore, is not just to win the game but to win in order to change the rules.

The Memorandum - even Pas stalwarts are loth to call it a blueprint or manifesto - throws a sop here and a concession there to appease the diverse interest groups whose claims to equal rights constitute the essence of representative government.

At heart, however, the Pas design is that of a theocracy, plain and simple. In looking around for a suitable model in a world in which the concept of an Islamic state has gone no further than an experiment to bring back the past, Pas ulama have gravitated towards none other than Iran.

There, parliamentary democracy is severely constrained by a web of clerical power blocs, such as the Council of Guardians, the Assembly of Experts, the judiciary, all answering ultimately to the Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah (in our case, Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat).

Somewhere in that tangle lies the executive branch of government, led by the President and Council of Ministers. Not surprisingly, the experiment

to merge modern democracy with a mediaeval system of government headed by the perfection of a Prophet acting as Caesar has resulted in a mess.

Pas, believe me, will make an equal if not a greater mess of it. Multiracial Malaysia is patently not Shia Iran. There are thus inconsistencies and contradictions galore in the Memorandum, centred in the attempt to square a "Westminster-style democracy" with the syariah paramount and separate laws for Muslims and non-Muslims.

The syariah argument as forwarded by Pas is fallacious and clearly a political ploy. Malaysia's laws and their enforcement already serve and even extend the fundamentals of justice contained in the syariah. Where they do not, as in family law for Muslims, the syariah applies explicitly.

At his closing address to the last Umno general assembly, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad cited the example of rape, a grave sin in Islam, a capital offence in Malaysian law.

The jurisprudence requiring the testimony of four worthy witnesses to convict the rapist is ludicrously ancient compared with the evidence of forensic science and the due process of rigorous prosecution and defence in a court of law. Indeed, the evolution of laws has gone so far in the West that it has forgotten how much was initially owed to Islamic influence.

This does not mean that Malaysia's law is "Western" or "secular" any more than Pas' hudud is "Islamic". The end-product must be justice by whatever available means, the more efficient the better. By denying itself the latest methods of prosecuting criminals, Pas' version of hudud falls well short of Islamic principles of justice and equity.

Those principles are perhaps most maligned by the Pas proposal for a different set of laws governing non-Muslims. The Memorandum says that they will not be treated as dhimmi - the religious minorities in Islamic lands allowed to do largely as they pleased through the payment of a poll tax or kharaj, but otherwise disfranchised.

At the time, compared to active religious persecution in the Christian West, the practice was indeed enlightened, even though the non-Muslims were second-class citizens. Pas has shown that it can't be trusted on this issue, and thus on everything else that concerns non-Muslims. Acting president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang tried to impose the kharaj in Terengganu when the party took over the State.

According to Pas, based on their enquiries, all non-Muslims want is a bit of pork, a bit of alcohol, a little gambling, a peppering of Chinese and non-Muslim concubinage, a dash of freedom to run their own schools, businesses and lives.

In the Memorandum, these bits are generously granted, but are certain to get progressively smaller the more they are seen to impinge on the Muslim majority. The logical outcome of the Pas programme is apartheid or Bantustan or Israel, in the treatment of Arabs in the Jewish state.

If Islam is ever to be applied in government today, and there is no reason not to, it must be through its universalism, not the parochialism of ad-hoc interpreters.

If Islamic administration is good enough for Muslims, it must be good enough for non-Muslims too, within an inclusive plurality where their rights and liberties are equally protected under a common law. Pas did not have to look far and wide for suitable examples. There is one right here in Muslim Malaysia, if only its chief architect, Umno, but knew it.

The trouble with Pas is that there is no true Islam save that of its version. Everyone else is an infidel or at best in a "state of ignorance" or jahiliya. This Islamist party, in its pursuit of power, will not spare blood.

The non-negotiable end is not only the radical Islamisation but also the

Arabisation of the Malays and other Muslims, even though the larger proportion of the ummah is in fact non-Arab.

The question is simple: whose inter-pretation of Islam will emerge dominant? Either one becomes completely subservient to the theocratic state or one supports the Malay modernists in Umno.