

**Ku Li poser: Killing 2 birds with one stone**  
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COMMENT It's interesting what purveyors of the recent rumour that Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah was approached by Pakatan Rakyat bigwigs to lead the opposition had wanted to achieve by their manoeuvre.

Now that that rumour had lost its sheen, due in no small part to disclaimers from no less than PAS spiritual leader Nik Aziz Nik Mat, examination of the motives behind the machinations may be necessary.

Literally, the rumour mongers had hoped to uproot two stumps with one shy at the wicket, to use a cricketing analogy. The merchants thought they could derail the Umno gadfly and disrupt Pakatan's unity at one go.

At first, it seemed the schemers had a straightforward aim. This was the undermining of the Pakatan consensus on Anwar Ibrahim's stature as the opposition coalition's undisputed leader.

Later, it became evident that their goal was double-edged: besides causing ructions within Pakatan, they would simultaneously weaken Razaleigh's long-shot at being Umno's choice of salvage prime minister.

The schemers had hoped that Razaleigh would be enticed by the talk that he was being considered, if not actually approached, to become substitute opposition leader and Pakatan candidate for PM if the coalition were to win the looming 13th general election.

Had Razaleigh signalled interest in the role, it would have done him in with a burgeoning claque of Umno has-beens who see him as restorer of the old ethos in Umno.

This swell by Umno's has-beens for Razaleigh, who in the last two years has steadily cultivated the aura of an above-the-fray critic of the nation's state of affairs, has deepened the furrows in the brow of the party hierarchy.

### **Credible replacement**

Goaded by nostalgia for a romanticised past, the claque of Umno has-beens have extrapolated defeat for the BN in the coming general election from the size and racial mix of the crowds for the Bersih 2.0 march on July 9.

This is quite a change from what used to be their position with regard to Pakatan.

They had observed the coalition's rise since the political tsunami of March 2008 with scepticism, convinced that the cooperation between secular DAP and theocratic PAS was inherently unworkable.

But after being startled by the size, multiracial composition, and spontaneous cooperation among the Bersih marchers, they now think Pakatan a credible replacement for BN and blame the obtuseness of the government's handling of Bersih as symptomatic of the way things have gone wrong with Umno-BN.

For this reason, they are looking to Razaleigh, a holdover from Umno's supposedly unsullied past, to lead the move to restore a derelict party to its past glory.

These nostalgia buffs do not yet possess the size and prowess of a pressure group but they could mushroom into a reckonable force.

This is the last thing that existing power brokers in Umno want, what with a general election near and a divisive contest between Najib and his deputy, Muhyiddin Yassin, looming at next year's triennial party elections.

These gurus of managerial acumen want to keep things sharp and focused. They want to deal with the general election first and then move on to tackle an internal challenge in the party.

For two decades now the conventional attitude towards challengers within Umno is that they are best handled after gaining an endorsement at the national level.

Get the national endorsement first; the party won't be averse to giving the leadership their support after the nation has signalled its okay, conformism being the dependable trait of the Umno flock.

### **Key witness gone cold**

But first before they could move to entice Razaleigh into a stumble vis-a-vis the restless clique of Umno has-beens, they had to be sure of things with respect to Sodomy II.

There appears to have been a development in the ongoing Sodomy II case that has spurred belief that the accusation against Anwar can be made to stick.

Throughout, the conspirators' game plan has been to destroy Anwar through a sustainable case of sodomy against him. They believe such a basis now exists for his conviction.

A key witness for Anwar's defence of alibi has gone strangely cold. His inaccessibility to the defence team, given his past relationship to Anwar, his religious rectitude, and his membership of a political party in which not acquiescing to falsehood is considered de rigeur, are all matters that would have made him a formidable witness for the defence.

But the person is unavailable and the trail has gone cold on him. When it became clear more than a year ago that this potential witness for the defence was not going to be the certainty he was expected to be, it suggested to the defence that the already steep path to exoneration for Anwar was going to be still more vertiginous.

However, Anwar and his defence team remained unswerving in their belief that the truth will out, no matter how determined the effort to undermine it.

But with the conspirators now confident that the unavailability of a key witness would fortify the case for conviction, they moved to sow confusion in Pakatan by insinuating Razaleigh into its leadership stakes, a move that would simultaneously finish off the Kelantan prince in the eyes of the Umno has-beens as an alternative leadership for Umno.

### **New ripples within Umno**

But Razaleigh has not budged from his above-the-fray stance. He is keeping his powder dry during Ramadan; there will be more disquisitions on the national estate after the Aidilfitri break.

This would further fortify his stature among the Umno has-beens who have scrambled to obtain copies of Razaleigh's speeches on state of the nation rendered over the past two years to small assemblies of non-partisan listeners in different parts of the country.

Meanwhile, new ripples within Umno, caused by a faction that thinks Najib Razak is a lame duck after the Bersih contretemps, have served to place Razaleigh in a favourable light as the party's salvage candidate for the PM's job.

This new faction is mulling its moves which would be forestalled if Najib decides, in the face of the worsening economic situation in the United States and the rest of the West, to call snap polls sometime soon.

This new faction is not confident that Umno-BN would win the polls but they are not sure how to upend

the party No 1 and place their man at the helm for a consolidation of ranks, and a revitalisation of the party's appeal before a final push for victory at the polls.

Things are swaying and shifting with the uncertain tides of factional politics. But one thing is certain that with a possible exception for Razaleigh, the tides have one unvarying undertow.

This is that Umno's politics represent the strife of financial interests masquerading as a contest to protect Malay political principles. This delusion has some way to go before it is exposed for the charade it has long been.

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