

**A sigh of relief from Pakatan
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By Terence Netto**

COMMENT There must have been this morning an audible exhalation of air from thousands of bated breaths in precincts where the opposition holds sway following news of the decision by PAS not to be involved in the Himpunan Sejuta Umat.

NONE Adding piquant flavour to the relief was the cagey explanation offered by party president Abdul Hadi Awang:

“PAS has been informed that the event does not involve political parties, thus PAS’ position is not to participate in the rally to respect the wishes of the organisers.”

The fabulous, they say, is never anything but the commonplace touched by the hand of ingenuity.

Himpunan’s organisers had nicely figured they had PAS, putative defenders of the sanctity of the Islamic religion in Malaysia, in a corner by touting the point that no political party (read Umno) had inspired them to hold the rally which is shaping up to be an anti-Christian gathering.

They felt that way they could entice PAS supporters to make common cause with them.

On the evidence of the decision not to be involved and by its explanation for non-involvement, the central leadership of PAS, in conclave last night, proved equal to the challenge.

They replied they shall abide by the Himpunan organisers’ wish to keep clear of political party involvement and stay away from Saturday’s rally.

There’s an art to giving the dubiously-intentioned enough rope to hang themselves; PAS has done that with their riposte to Himpunan’s organising claque.

The latter reckoned by assuring all and sundry that such agent provocateurs as Zulkifli Nordin and Ezam Mohd Noor, who are allied to Umno, were not involved in the planning of the rally, they would give their banner a non-partisan patina. This would draw support from across the Islamic political spectrum.

No need to rein in Nasrudin

NONET True, the PAS Youth leader Nasrudin Hassan (right) has already indicated his movement’s support for Saturday’s rally.

But he is someone who can always be counted on to be only a pace or two to the left of the rabid Harussani Zakaria, the Perak mufti. And that’s not saying something in his favour, Harussani being beyond the pale of a non-Muslim’s perception of religious moderation. Having adopted an official hands-off stance to the Himpun rally, PAS should not now muzzle or balk Nasrudin in his attempt to provide support to the event.

A democratic party ought not to hinder dissenters on matters like these; also, this way PAS would be extending to Nasrudin the discretionary wisdom of its ‘Give ’em enough rope’ policy.

As with ostensible would-be allies like Himpun’s organisers so also with putative allies like Nasrudin - consistency of stance is key to resolving touchy issues.

By its decision not to get involved with Himpun and by its rationale for opting out, PAS has shown

equipoise in picking its way through the shoals of a complex polity.

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