

Pakatan's social democracy takes root
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COMMENT Except for the fact it does not assure that no MP from the party will move a Private Member's Bill to have hudud enacted, the latest PAS policy document 'Negara Berkeadilan' all but confirms that an Islamic state is not the party's goal when and if Pakatan Rakyat takes power.

pakatan ceramah shah alam 041211 anwar hadiComing as it does a week after MCA made a concerted attempt to re-ignite non-Muslim fear of an Islamic state, the PAS policy statement acts as counter to that fear and the BN parties' exploitation of it.

Nearer to the general election, the BN components can be counted on to resuscitate the bogey to frighten non-Muslim voters into thinking that support for Pakatan is an invitation to PAS to introduce hudud.

A 'Nation of Care and Opportunity', as the PAS policy document released on Sunday is subtitled, goes some distance in assuring that a social democracy, not an Islamic state, is what PAS has in mind when, together with its Pakatan allies PKR and DAP, it comes to power.

Not exactly a panacea but...

Social democracies are going out of fashion in Europe - where from the 1960s the German social democrats were the most successful at giving credence to it - because of unsustainable government debt caused chiefly by uncontrollable entitlements.

However, in this part of the world, this ideology of government is set to be given renewed sustenance by a Pakatan administration should it come to power after Malaysia's 13th general election, expected to be set in train after the Chinese New Year festivities of late January-early February are completed.

NONEPakatan ideologues believe that once corruption is whittled down to the bone, competitive tenders are introduced, the public sector made more efficient and purpose-driven, and national resources allocated more equitably, the hard-working middle class in Malaysia would be sprung and those at the bottom of the ladder would be uplifted by savings on governmental operational costs that will be channeled to them.

Ditto, a social democracy would be born, aided and abetted by a host of liberalisations to the political culture by the removal from the statute books of repressive laws.

A reformed and revitalised judiciary and a renewed police force would be the icing on the plum pudding of a Pakatan government.

This is not exactly a panacea for all that ails the country but, if realised, would represent a radical improvement over what presently obtains under Umno-BN.

Prescriptions based on wrong diagnosis

The Umno-BN pattern of governance, even more so under the bogus reformer Najib Razak than under his predecessors, is for the sustenance of a national assets - and

resources-appropriating plutocracy at the top, displaying elements of a social democracy for the bottom especially when elections are hovering, opting for a muddle where social and educational policies are concerned - all this, against a backdrop of recurrent racial and religious tensions.

Though this module of governance is no longer tenable, its traits are so entrenched that when the skipper of the crew attempts reform or liberalisation, the supposed improvement turns out to be worse than the previous condition.

NONEThis simply means that the people with the prescriptions are basing their actions on wrong diagnosis.

This is what has happened to practically all measures adopted by the government of Prime Minister Najib to reform and improve, in the last two and half years, the administration he inherited from his predecessor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The inescapable point is that the stale thinking that underlies the Umno-BN module of governance, the product of a 54-year incumbency, simply cannot be banished under a hail of modernising labels, like 'Government Transformation Programme', 'Economic Transformation Programme', '1Malaysia - People First, Performance Now'.

These terms' vacancy is soon exposed and the electorate moves from suspicion that "Something's rotten in the state of Denmark", to use Shakespearean terminology, to a determination to rid the country of the stench.

Genuine reform, not illusory promises

PAS' antennae tell them that the people want genuine reform, not illusory promises, which is why the party is prepared to relegate its long-held Islamic state agenda to a backburner.

It would be unwise to assume that that agenda would stay there because support for syariah is a Muslim obligation.

NONEIt's certain to come up again but when that happens, what is presently happening in the Islamic crescent countries extending from the Mediterranean to the Bosphorus would impact on Muslim politics in Malaysia.

One cannot be sure how things would eventuate in the Islamic crescent but the Khomeinist module that won out in the Iranian crisis of the late 1970s - a module that wasn't really intended by the main actors of the anti-Shah insurrection - is not the definitive word on how things would culminate.

In other words, the dice is rolling but in the age of the Internet and other social media, the numbers it comes up cannot last if rigged against democracy and the basic freedoms considered vital for its upkeep.

Somebody ought to tell Vladimir Putin this.

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