

## **Battle-ready DAP heads for the high seas**

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COMMENT Despite a recent spell of internal ructions, the DAP heads to a one-day national convention in Shah Alam tomorrow as the most cohesive of the three components of Pakatan Rakyat.

Last month's very public skirmishes between party chairman Karpal Singh and Penang Deputy Chief Minister P Ramasamy are now regarded as embarrassing but small quavers in an otherwise harmonious party that is largely focused on gaining for Pakatan tenancy rights to Putrajaya.

The DAP does not sport an ideological divide such as prevails in fellow Pakatan member PAS, where there is an evident fault line between its 'liberal' and its 'conservative' wings; and has a clearer hierarchy of command than does PKR, where Anwar Ibrahim bestrides like a colossus while the rest of its leadership phalanx are paddlers in his slipstream.

The DAP, in comparison, is more conspicuous in its leadership hierarchy, more cohesive in its social democratic ideology, and, more importantly, more focused on gaining for Pakatan the keys to rule the nation.

How has the DAP come by this rather advantageous position, vis-a-vis its fellow Pakatan compatriots?

The simple explanation is that a neat division of responsibility among its principal leaders - party adviser Lim Kit Siang and secretary general Lim Guan Eng - has been conducive for the achievement of the twin goals of internal consolidation and singular support for Pakatan's goal of occupying Putrajaya.

While Guan Eng, as secretary-general, kept his focus on consolidating the party while credibly assaying the role of chief minister of Penang, veteran Kit Siang attended every top leadership council meeting of Pakatan to ensure that the opposition hewed to its goal of a more egalitarian polity.

Its consistency in the latter regard has dovetailed nicely with a sentiment abroad in the land that the time has arrived for a different constellation of parties to take the reins of national governance.

As a sign of the growth and spread of this sentiment, take the reaction of the opposition-supporting public when faced with the recent skirmishing in the DAP and the flagrant Umno-supporting antics of Dr Hasan Ali of PAS.

There was only dismay not leading to reconsideration of support, at the DAP skirmishes, and contempt not amounting to severance of support, for PAS at the internal division-causing gyrations of Hasan Ali.

Sign of maturity

Dare we to conclude that, perhaps, the level of maturity of the opposition-supporting public is now higher than that reflected by the behaviour and actions of some signal members of the Pakatan leadership corps?

It does seem that by being more in tune with this level of maturity and what it betokens of how the opposition-supporting public feels about the state of governance in Malaysia, the DAP has fine-tuned its public image and its general deportment to keep with the flow, with the result that it is more cohesive, coherent and concentrated of the Pakatan component parties.

It must be noted here that the DAP ignored the bait dangled by an obstreperous Hasan Ali, who in the general speculation over who should become Pakatan's candidate for interim prime minister should

Anwar land in jail over Sodomy II, weighed in with his suggestion that it ought to be Nik Aziz or Hadi Awang.

The DAP's reticence on the matter is a sign of maturity - this despite the probability that it may in the general election that is said to be imminent may wind up with the highest number of parliamentary seats among the Pakatan triad.

It is a sign of maturity in politics that one understands that politics is not only the art of the possible but it is also the knowledge of the limits of the possible: Malaysians are not ready to countenance the idea of a Chinese PM, not even one in the interim.

But should DAP steer close to the winds of political change in the country that a majority of Malaysians appear to want, then some inherently impossible scenarios now may well become less so fairly soon.

The pattern of DAP's responses to Malaysian society's need for change after more than a half-century of Umno-BN's aimless lurching hither and yon would be critical to making the now impossible more malleable to creative and emancipating change.

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