

Pakatan nicely poised at critical juncture
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By a fortuitous combination of circumstances, Pakatan Rakyat found itself nicely placed on the eve of a court decision that has implications for the opposition coalition's cohesion.

First, Pakatan component PAS decided that enough was enough and expelled Hasan Ali, its Selangor state executive councilor, who has been a persistent thorn not just in the party's side but also in the coalition's.

He had to be extruded and PAS did just that yesterday after having dithered over how to contain this recalcitrant since last August when Hasan went out on a limb on the bogey of Christian proselytisation of Muslims, an issue that is like climate change - one cannot be sure if it's occurring or not.

Hasan ali pcFast on the heels of Hasan's expulsion yesterday came the announcement by another Pakatan component, DAP, that it is closing ranks after a distracting bout of intramural feuding and is unswerving in its support for Pakatan supremo Anwar for the post of prime minister, irrespective of his fate at the hands of the judge in Sodomy II whose verdict is set for today.

As if PAS' exorcism of an internal menace and DAP's unanimity on a pivotal issue were not enough, a renegade from PKR ranks, Zaid Ibrahim, expressed contrition over harsh things he had said about Anwar immediately before and after exiting the party a year ago.

Zaid's mea culpa reduced blogger Raja Petra Kamarudin's recent public strictures about his former ally, Anwar Ibrahim, to a minor footnote in the saga.

By itself, each happening would have afforded for some mileage to the Pakatan coalition. In combination - and all three events occurred yesterday - they constituted an embarrassment of advantages for Pakatan.

So the good fairies are smiling on Pakatan - what a difference three years have made!

Najib's reform sputtered to a halt

Almost three years ago to the month, the opposition coalition was entered into an underwhelming phase where the departure to the independent benches of three assemblypersons in Perak led to the toppling of the Pakatan government in the state.

Coming as it did a few months after the failure of the Anwar-bruited 'September 16' takeover of the federal government by Pakatan through crossovers from the Sabah and Sarawak wings of BN, Pakatan appeared to have run out of the momentum the tsunami of March 2008 had given them.

najib abdullah 100408Najib Abdul Razak's replacement of a shell-shocked Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as prime minister in April 2009 was supposed to presage a recharged and renewed Umno-BN.

A refreshed and replenished government under Najib shaped to reverse the gains Pakatan had obtained, with Perak's return to the Umno-BN fold a seeming portent of things to come.

But Najib found the reforms he hoped to make easier to intimate than to initiate. Combined with a tendency to trim his sails when his initiatives ran into head winds, the PM's agenda of reform sputtered to a halt.

A litany of scandals

Meanwhile, serial exposure of financial and other scandals in government meant that not only were reforms difficult to implement, but the impression of the administration in a state of decay beyond hope of reformation gained ground.

All this accorded with the narrative about what ails the country that was indefatigably propounded by Pakatan's pied piper, Anwar, who shook a combative fist at a potentially damaging arraignment - his second in a decade (1998-2008) - for sodomy.

As the prosecution's case against him proceeded feebly, another potentially deleterious scandal was unleashed on Anwar - this time a sex video purporting to show him in a transaction with a sex worker.

But this caper, too, lost steam over time. As both sex tape and court case declined in credibility, Anwar's portrayal of himself as a victim of career-destroying conspiracies began to resonate with the crowds he drew to his incessant campaigns.

Not only now did the crowds begin to believe in his victimisation narratives, they also saw that his espousal of Pakatan as a preferable alternative to Umno-BN as a government was not wishful thinking.

In the last few months, a series of corruption scandals in the Najib administration and the withering ridicule that the DNA testing, on which Anwar's guilt hinged, was exposed to in the sodomy trial combined to shift the onus of proof on to the government than on its chief critic.

Matters have now reached the point where whatever verdict the judge hands down today in the sodomy trial would redound to the government's disadvantage rather than to its chief nemesis.

That combined with the expulsion of a willful troublemaker from PAS, in tandem with DAP's unified voice in support of the Pakatan supremo, have nicely placed the opposition coalition and its anchor on the home stretch for the final spurt to Putrajaya.

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