

## **Hata could be leading edge of DAP thrust in Johor**

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COMMENT Not since trade unionists Ahmad Nor and Zainal Rampak joined the DAP in the 1980s has the party succeeded in attracting prominent union leaders to its fold than when Hata Wahari enlisted a fortnight ago.

The expelled Utusan Malaysia journalist and former president of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) joining the burgeoning ranks of ethnic Malays in the party is proof of the DAP's growing status as a political party of multiracial composition.

Until Ahmad Nor, once president of Cuepacs - the public sector trade union - and Zainal - once president of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress - joined the DAP, the party had only Ibrahim Singgeh to show for a Malay leader in its ranks. Ibrahim was vice-chairman of DAP at one time.

NONEHata joining the DAP augurs well for the party, not just for reason of the occupational sector from which he originates but also for the area from which he hails.

Hata is from Kluang, Johor, where the DAP had a prominent presence in the 1970s in the person of its one-time treasurer Lee Kau.

A popular figure among Kluangites, Lee was for several terms a state assembly person and then MP for Kluang from the 1970s until the early 1980s.

Having friends in all three communities, the approachable Lee would travel around town with a typewriter in the boot of his car.

A regular presence at coffee shops near the Kluang town market and at the famous railway station, Lee would be seen readily helping voters with letters that required an MP's endorsement.

Preferring amiable engagement to distance, or, worse, confrontation, Lee enjoyed an amicable relationship with Kluang's long-time Umno baron, Syed Zain Al-Shahab, during the years of his victories in his state and parliamentary seats, wins that prevented BN from a clean sweep of Johor by the ruling coalition.

DAP had no successor to Lee after the latter's retirement from politics in the mid-1980s, proving that what strength they had mustered in Kluang was owed to Lee's singular charm.

Perhaps with Hata's joining the DAP, there is the opportunity for the DAP to attempt a revival of the prominence it once enjoyed when Lee Kau was its standard-bearer in Kluang.

Live and let live

Some Malay former members of PKR from the party's Johor divisions have applied to join DAP as a result of the fallout from the Azmin Ali-Zaid Ibrahim contest for the deputy president of party in late 2010.

Understandably, the DAP has been wary of fully embracing these new members because of anxiety over the unease this may stir in a Pakatan Rakyat coalition partner.

azlanThe DAP should not be too inhibited about this type of intra-coalition crossovers.

In the past, PKR has taken in some former DAP dissidents and even fielded them in the last general election, to no discernible annoyance to the DAP.

In this respect, it would be wise to adopt a live-and-let-live policy; the Pakatan umbrella under which a wide array of oppositionists can shelter should necessarily be broad.

Otherwise, one would find that the new fangled group, called ABU (Anyone but Umno) would gain adherents who would otherwise want to join one or the other Pakatan component parties.

It's not that ABU should not flourish, but when there is already an opposition coalition that is flatly opposed to Umno, a new opposition grouping would be a tad superfluous.

Hisham's hold on Kluang shaky

Suffice, in Hata and in some ex-PKR members who have recently applied to join DAP in Johor, the party has the personnel that could begin to make serious inroads in Umno-BN's hitherto unchallenged domination of Johor.

In the brief time that he was NUJ president, Hata had made a mark as a union leader who fought to uphold the professional ethics of his occupation.

His stand which led to his sacking by Utusan gained him national prominence which should enhance his electoral prospects in Kluang, which now comes under the Sembrong parliamentary seat.

It is said that incumbent MP, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein, does not feel quite safe in this fairly mixed-race constituency which is why he is eyeing the relative safety of Kota Tinggi, presently held by the certain-to-be-retired Syed Hamid Albar.

All said, the auguries are good for a revival of the DAP in central Johor.

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