

In Kedah, PAS is faced with character test
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COMMENT PAS ought to move with all deliberate speed to quell the qualms that have arisen with respect to Kedah Menteri Besar Azizan Abdul Razak.

The doubts about him have been given added impetus by the latest, and by far, the more serious allegations made against him yesterday by their party's state executive councilor Phahrolrazi Zawawi (left).

While bearing in mind that an allegation is just what it is - an unsubstantiated claim - the nature of good governance requires that Caesar's wife be above suspicion.

Given the content of the allegations aired by a colleague of Azizan's and the ease of their verification, PAS should be able to come to a finding and a decision in a matter of days.

The demands of good and transparent governance, irrevocable tenets of Pakatan Rakyat's agenda for change for the Malaysian people, require that PAS dispose of this matter with all deliberate haste.

This being the immediate prelude to the 13th general election, there can be no dithering in the face of the grave allegations made by one state minister against his chief in a Pakatan-ruled administration.

Any Umno-like wavering, apropos the National Feedlot Corporation scandal, by the PAS leadership would be disastrous for it in particular and Pakatan in general.

Judicious use of power

PAS had recently demonstrated it has the ability to tackle problems posed by its disaffected governors.

On a matter that was inherently difficult to verify - that of Christian proselytisation of Muslims aired by the party's one time Selangor state leader, the now-expelled Hasan Ali - PAS moved with panache to douse the problem and finally stifled the threat posed by his inflammatory posturing.

All in all, it was a splendid exhibition of the judicious use of power, combining restraint with toughness, deliberation with action.

penang kedah timber logging azizan abdul razak 310708 03Now, in the allegations made by Phahrolrazi against Azizan (right), comes a test for a party that flaunts the morality of its leaders as above reproach - a test that will be watched closely for what it would reveal of PAS' ability to match deed to word.

For at least two years now rumours have swirled over his Azizan's stewardship of Kedah. Few, if any, could put their finger on what all the unease was about.

The disinclination of party confreres and coalition colleagues to dwell on the subject stemmed from an understandable sense that the cabal of camaraderie, especially in a fledgling administration, should override incipient doubts about the ability of the skipper.

Furthermore, the fact that the state civil service, as in Pakatan-ruled Selangor and, to a lesser extent, in Penang, is steeped in Umno-honed mores contributed to a sense that the going would be tough in any case, so why rock the boat.

Also, such facts as the sharp spike in revenue from logging concessions, attributable to the absence of leakages in the collection process, only served to reinforce the impression that the logic of Pakatan's

corruption-free governance would soon overwhelm forces of reaction in the civil and municipal services.

In short, the new state administration, under Azizan's leadership, simply would not fail to make an impact in the longer, if not, the medium term.

Initial mumblings become a rumble

But when the initial mumblings about Azizan's allegedly ineffectual style became a rumble toward the end of the fourth year of his administration, the PAS central leadership tried to prevail upon the menteri besar, who by then had already suffered a coronary, to make way for someone with more vigour.

He resisted the move. The party's leaders refrained from pressing the case for his removal because they feared the dissension it could trigger at a time when a general election was looming.

Though crises do not occur at random, they can be importunate in timing which is why the PAS central leadership's latest attempt - with a wary eye to a fast-approaching general election - to mediate the ructions failed.

Now one member of the state government has given vent to the troubles' supposedly underlying causes which are serious enough to warrant action of the most drastic kind.

Any attempt to defer action on account of the general election would compromise PAS' and Pakatan's pledge of implacable hostility towards corrupt practices.

It was in Alor Setar, where Pakatan held its third consecutive national convention on Jan 14 that Pakatan supremo Anwar Ibrahim starkly emphasised what he said would be the signal trait of its governing philosophy.

"If you are corrupt, out you go," he said to an audience that included Azizan.

Any suspicion that things would be otherwise in a Pakatan administration would make their pretensions to Putrajaya presumptuous.

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