

**Pakatan must beware the dangers of hubris**  
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**by Terence Netto**

COMMENT Rhetorical excesses in the prelude to a general election are par for the course.

If in war, as Winston Churchill said, truth is the first casualty, then on the stump, heading toward polls as hotly contested as the country's 13th general election is shaping to be, it is only to be expected that nuance would be a prime victim.

Still, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng's hortatory call, "If we can, let the BN eat eggs this time," to a brimming fundraising event in Penang on Tuesday night that reputedly raised a remarkable half a million ringgit, held a disturbing echo.

NONE It reminded one of Khir Toyo's pledge before the last general election that Umno-BN aimed to reduce their opponents in the Selangor state assembly to "pembangang sifar" (zero opposition).

Hubris - the pride that goes before a fall - helped undermine Umno-BN the last time around.

Given the arrogance of the ruling coalition then, this was to be expected.

There's no need to refer to Lord Acton's dictum about power to understand that the experience of unchallenged rule over several decades has corruptive - and ultimately self-destructive - consequences.

NONE Even now, reports that Prime Minister Najib Razak expects to recover for his coalition of its once-customary two-thirds majority suggest they have not been purged of their dysfunctional condition.

The toxic grit from several decades' experience of intoxicating power is not easily got rid off; the delousing would take time and would surely require the shock of an ousting before it can be regarded as having begun in earnest.

But even before this ousting can be achieved, Pakatan Rakyat must beware the dangers of hubris.

Simple majority should do

The coalition's putative supremo has already said that they would be satisfied with a simple majority to commence their agenda of national rejuvenation for Malaysia.

Not from Anwar Ibrahim, familiar with not only the moral but also the physical hazards (vide his ISA-detention sustained 'black eye') posed by the arrogance of power stemming from preponderant parliamentary majorities, would there be idle talk of "pembangang sifar" or the wish that the BN "eat eggs".

Early awareness of Reinhold Niebuhr's aphorism: "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary", which Anwar quoted in his 1996 Budget speech to Parliament as finance minister had shed its humbling light on him.

NONE No doubt, the incessant attacks by Umno-BN and its stooges on the Penang chief minister, valiantly borne since the time he took office, had left a vengeance-desiring residue in Guan Eng (right).

Hence the understandable vitriol of his "let them eat eggs this time" battle cry.

But, truth to tell, Pakatan should eschew any desire to see BN reduced to sucking eggs for what Lord Acton cautioned would be the consequences.

Overwhelming victory undesirable

Pakatan supporters of long memory would recall 'Mister Opposition' Dr Tan Chee Koon's anguished plea, in endorsing the then PSRM chief Kassim Ahmad's candidacy for Balik Pulau in the run-up to the 1982 general election, that voters not render the ruling party an overwhelming majority because that would be tantamount to a "negation of democracy".

For the maturation of Malaysian democracy, BN needs to be voted out of office but not reduced - at either state or federal level - to "pembangkang sifar".

Though, fortunately, the possibility of that happening is remote, and discounting for campaign rhetoric that is not nuanced, it would still be wise for Pakatan's orators to refrain from foisting the notion on their now-teeming audiences that overwhelming winning majorities are desirable, if only as salve for the slings and arrows of Umno's often outrageous campaign through proxies against leaders like Guan Eng.

NONThe DAP leader ought to take heart that he can bank on the support of people like PAS' Mohamed Sabu (left in photo) who is virtually saying that he prefers the supposed perils of secular friendships such he has with Guan Eng to the dubious benefits of ties with his co-religionists in Umno.

The realism that underlies this stance is Niebuhrian, to wit, that differences breed unity; that we subtly replicate the faults when zealously desiring their removal in our adversaries; and that overwhelming majorities are spawning grounds for self-destruction.

On the cusp of a probable victory in the polls, Pakatan leaders must refrain from deploying some rhetorical devices whose use without nuance contains self-destructive seeds.

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