

PSM errs in electing to go it alone
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By ence Netto

COMMENT Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) is making a mistake by electing to use its own logo and not the ones of its Pakatan Rakyat allies in the upcoming general election.

psm 24 discharged 101011 03Yesterday, PSM secretary general S Arutchelvam (right) voiced the view that his party expects to do better by campaigning under its own banner.

PSM is being unduly optimistic, but more on that later.

Sure, every party would want to foster its own logo - and name - recognition among the electorate.

But PSM has been in the difficult position - between 1999 when it filed for recognition and 2008 when it gained that status - of trying to sustain its public profile and activity while waiting for the Registrar of Societies to recognise it as a political entity.

Recognition by the ROS only came six months after the general election of March 2008. After an almost 10-year delay, during which time PSM's recourse to the courts for an override of the ROS's decision proved fruitless, the registrar made an about turn and granted the party recognition.

It won't take a genius to know why: the powers-that-be want to divide the opposition into a host of fractious parties.

By allowing for PSM's registration after the opposition had made stunning gains in the 2008 polls, the authorities hoped to encourage the party to officially emerge and distance itself from Pakatan.

That surreptitious objective was somewhat realised.

No common logo

PSM, though in solidarity with Pakatan on critical issues like electoral reform and minimum wage, decided to steer clear from being formally allied to Pakatan.

True, all three Pakatan components - PKR, DAP and PAS - are only notionally wedded to the opposition alliance.

They don't have a common logo like the ruling BN coalition, but their Common Policy Framework has been formidable enough to have withstood a number of attempts at self-inflicted damage by the more theocratic elements of PAS.

Further, Pakatan coalition governments in Selangor and Kedah have weathered the divisive machinations of Dr Hasan Ali in the first case and the maladroit handling of Menteri Besar Azizan Abdul Razak in the second.

Pakatan had rode out those storms enough to suggest that the absence of a common logo is a not such a serious setback to the opposition alliance.

Witness the divergence from what is apparently the Umno position between fellow BN member Gerakan, latterly joined by the MCA, on the Lynas rare earth issue and you have as good an example as you can get that BN's possession of a common logo and identity does not make it a more coherent alliance compared to the ideologically novice Pakatan.

NONEPolitics is the art of the possible so that the fact of Pakatan's continuing adhesiveness despite ideological incoherence is surely owing to strong feelings among voters that the BN can only be overthrown if the opposition unites.

The agenda of political reform enjoys broad support among the people despite divergence in the religious and ideological confessions of the parties that compose the opposition to the BN, obscurantist defenders of a status quo that is widely unpopular.

Broadly, PSM is in agreement with this agenda and could only differ on its details.

The thrust of this agenda, inferred from adumbrations of it in policies and practices thus far of both the DAP-led Penang state government and the PKR-dominant Selangor one, is social democratic.

It is an emphasis PSM could hardly find fault with. In fact, PSM's most significant contribution to a hypothetical Pakatan federal government would be in the housing and healthcare sectors.

Even if PSM are not physically part of the government, it's hard to visualise such an administration being deaf to their ideas on housing and healthcare.

Both sectors are vulnerable to the machinations of profiteers, however well intentioned maybe the ameliorative schemes of policy formulators.

PSM's target - four seats

Vigilance by PSM in the form of critical monitoring and constructive criticism of Pakatan initiatives would be welcome.

There's more going for a minuscule party like PSM to keep within the ambit of Pakatan than would be the case if it opts for extrusion.

kua kia soong new book launching patriot and pretender 240911 psm nasirTheir representational goals in the upcoming general election would be to retain the Sungai Siput parliamentary (Dr D Jeyakumar) and Kota Damansara state (Dr Mohd Nasir Hashim, right) seats while doing their level best, with the help of their Pakatan allies, to gain the state seat of Semenyih in Selangor for the indefatigable Arutchelvam.

Negotiations for the state seat of Jelapang in Perak would stand a better chance of succeeding if PSM conducts it under the aegis of PKR, the banner under which the party gained success in Sungai Siput and Kota Damansara in the 2008 election.

To claim, as Arutchelvam has done, that PSM stands a better chance of doing well in the coming polls on its own steam is about as plausible as saying that Prime Minister Najib Razak stands a better chance than Abdullah Ahmad Badawi or Muhyiddin Yassin of regaining for Umno-BN its two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Just take a look at the PSM logo of a clenched and upraised fist emblazoned in white against a blood-red backdrop.

It conjures an image of militancy and the colour scheme harkens back to an era of trade unionist assertion and strength.

These are motifs that have receded in relevance as computerisation and technological innovation have transformed the workplace and reduced reliance on mass employment.

These developments have reduced socialism from a serviceable ideology to a persuasion whose best contribution would be as a leaven for the inevitable excesses of democratic capitalism.

In sum, PSM ought to be realistic. It has a role to play, as a significant bit player, in the drama of Malaysia's democratic restoration which should issue in an egalitarian socio-economic system - the more equable, surely, by virtue of PSM's vigilance.

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