

Hadi paddles deftly on PM-designate issue

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COMMENT One has to admire the cagey footwork of PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang on what has become a favourite topic of a press that is now willing to contemplate the possibility of a victory for Pakatan Rakyat in the general election:

Who would become prime minister should the opposition coalition of PAS, DAP and PKR come to power at GE13?

Prior to the annual general assembly of PAS in Kota Bharu last November, this issue was not in doubt: PKR adviser Anwar Ibrahim was the Pakatan PM-designate, over and out.

At the assembly, a Malacca delegate raised the subject from the floor, proposing Hadi as the party's choice for Pakatan PM, whereupon the idea was carried by spontaneous acclamation.

Predictably, the BN-biased mainstream media went on to make great play out of this, that Pakatan is a fragile coalition which would disintegrate the moment they are given the keys to Putrajaya.

But since that sounding of potential discord, Pakatan has not been as fissiparous as the BN media make out - for example, they managed the diversity of views on the 'Allah' issue that resurfaced late last year with an aplomb that suggests Pakatan are going to paint some divisive issues in pastels rather than in primary colours.

Pakatan council to decide

This management of complexities in situations need not be antithetical to the holding of a principled view or advocacy.

Proof of this was shown by the PAS president when he again had to paddle the rapids that the question of who is Pakatan's PM-designate conjures.

He was posed this question in Shah Alam yesterday where he had given a talk on the welfare state that his party is espousing.

Hadi, who in the last year or so has become an interesting amalgam of Islamic ideologue and Malaysian democrat, said that the country's 13.3 million voters would decide the answer to that question.

Nobody of democratic persuasion would be inclined to quarrel with that answer, even if you were to concede the point that, nominally, the issue of who is to be Pakatan's candidate for PM would be decided by the central leadership council of the coalition.

That is the body, composed of 30 members - 10 from each component - that had deliberated and decided on the major decisions that have emanated from Pakatan in the last five years, including the one on permissibility of the use of the 'Allah' term by non-Muslims.

Presumably, all 30 members (the overall number is fixed but the identity of each member is not because that is left to each component party to determine as when meetings are convened) who will compose Pakatan's post-GE13 central council would have been elected either to Parliament or a state assembly, in which case Hadi's argument that Malaysians voters would decide the coalition's candidate for PM is not greatly attenuated.

The logic behind Hadi's proposition is unexceptionable: the elect of Malaysian voters elects Pakatan's premier.

Hadi was not quite sound on other aspects of the criteria he espoused on PM-selection but there was a logic behind them that democrats would not dispute.

No constitutional bar on non-Muslims

He said the Pakatan PM nominee would have to be Muslim and accepted by the king.

The federal constitution does not stipulate that the PM of the country must be Muslim and it is broadly understood, notwithstanding what the appellate courts said in the case of the constitutional crisis in Perak in 2009, that he who commands a majority in the House obtains the royal assent to be skipper of the nation- or state-governing crew.

Hadi's provisos that Pakatan's PM-nominee must be accepted by Malaysian voters, non-Muslims included, went some way in retrieving his error in holding that the PM must be Muslim.

Malaysians broadly accept that the PM must be Muslim but there is no constitutional bar on non-Muslims holding the position - it is something that is conceivable in the future.

True, PAS, as a party inherently led by Muslims, would not be able to conceive of a future in which the Malaysian PM is not Muslim.

But the fact that yesterday, in remarks he made on the issue of Pakatan's PM-nominee, the PAS president did not hermetically seal himself off when it came to considering the diversity of views, and from the way he steered by the ethic of democratic choice, there is cause for hope in the future on the question of a non-Muslim PM for the country.

