

No 'moral victory' for Pakatan in conversion row

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"Such a move had triggered many unnecessary controversies and this would also cost the BN government its image, therefore the non-Muslims cabinet members have the responsibility to explain to the public on their action."

- Chua Soi Lek

COMMENT I have no idea why Dr Chua Soi Lek thinks that amongst a certain section of the voting public, the BN government has an image that it has to maintain. Most times BN seems intent on proving that it is more interested in pandering to the far (Malay) right segment of its component parties than in creating policies that is reflective of its so-called 1Malaysia stance.

NONEWhatever "image" BN had to maintain was demolished when the MCA chose not to participate in the federal government after its disastrous performance in the recently concluded general elections. Therefore, while the MIC is on life support, the party, which is supposed to represent 'Chinese' interests in the coalition, is reduced to the role of Cassandra warning the community of impending irrelevance and the same time attempting to maintain the facade of its own political relevance.

All this is extremely amusing of course because it was the MCA which was warning the Chinese community of the possible 'hudud' Armageddon or 'hudugeddon' if PAS was ever voted into federal power.

Irony is too kind a word to use here because after all it was under the Umno watch that this country entered a phase of Arabisation that left the non-Muslim communities seething with resentment. This is one of the more important factors that led to a political tsunami and the creation of an oppositional alliance that for all intents is a walking contradiction.

It is pointless blaming the non-Muslim cabinet representatives because most probably they are of the 'saya setuju' ilk that was the downfall of the non-Malay component parties in the alliance.

However, it is pointless kicking the MCA merely because they are irrelevant and if Chua really wants to ensure the viability of his party, he should first start by taking care of business when it comes to his party propaganda organs. However, this is not my story to tell and I will leave it to others to relate that tale.

No, the only image that was tarnished in this whole fiasco was that of Pakatan Rakyat. Of course, Umno is ever willingly to take the cheap shot (as do most political parties in this country or anywhere in the world for that) but as usual Pakatan did not raise to the challenge and left those of us, hoping for real and sustained change feeling as if the same old games were being played.

Tough issues involving Islam

As someone who is not interested in the easy feel good-ism of the place Islam (or the kind practised here) has in the alternative coalition, I have warned that when it comes to the tough issues concerning Islam and however one wishes to define 'secularism', Islam always trumps secular principles.

The honourable gentleman from Gelang Patah, Lim Kit Siang, said: "There should have been full discussions and a consensus before any Bill of that nature can be tabled." Well yes, ideally there should be, and what should be disturbing to right-thinking Malaysians is that Pakatan that is supposed to safeguard non-Muslim interests under the Bangsa Malaysia ideal, would dither on such an important issue.

NONE what we got is Pakatan's rather embarrassing counter attack of setting up its own committee to "study the issue".

"We have already set up a Pakatan committee to look into this and we will meet soon," said Nurul Izzah echoing her father who said, "We are looking at the Bill thoroughly and I have had a initial discussion with (PAS president) Hadi Awang and also (Penang Chief Minister) Lim Guan Eng to get some understanding before we give a public response."

Exactly what better "understanding" is there to get. As human rights lawyer Malik Imtiaz Sarwar (and one of the few individuals in this country who you could describe as a public intellectual and not be embarrassed) said: "I am glad that it (the Bill) became controversial, but in truth, I don't understand why it did because other states already have this provision: one or the other; ibu atau bapa (father or mother)..."

"What they tried to do recently for the Federal Territories was to make it consistent with what the court said in the Subashini (Rajasingam vs Saravanan Thangathoray) case as well as other states."

Therefore, while we had a few non-Muslim members of Pakatan making comments couched in the usual 'personal capacity' drag, there was no unified stand coming

from Pakatan. Indeed the most noise came from BN non-Muslim coalition members who were vilified as either running dogs or part of a 'sandiwara' meant to destabilise the opposition.

While I believe that Umno is capable of any strategy to destabilise the opposition, I also believe that Umno is capable of riding roughshod over its component party members, expecting no resistance whatsoever.

Perhaps political irrelevancy has resulted in the rediscovery of whatever fighting spirit that was leached away in the Umno years, but the fact is that this fight was meant to be fought by the opposition and not by political parties which have been abandoned by a certain section of the voting public.

Instead the tough rhetoric emanated from BN non-Muslim component parties and what we were left with was Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim prattling on about "...a specific case where the Prophet Muhammad sent a child back to the mother because the mother did not convert to Islam and only the father did so".

Defend the constitution

Understand now, that usually I would have no problem with religionists relying on their religious dogma to come to some sort of egalitarian 'secular' compromise but in this instance, it just seemed disingenuous.

The principles are already in the federal constitution as the Bar Council reminds us: "The Bar Council had pointed out that this is inconsistent with the 11th Schedule, Section 2(95) of the federal constitution, which states that 'words in the singular include the plural, and words in the plural include the singular' when interpreting the constitution."

So really, there is no need to for all this frantic discussion and taking account of Muslim sensitivities. Here was a principle which was easily defended and what we got was an alternative alliance mired in the same kind of double speak that is characteristic of Umno.

NONE About the only thing I disagree with Malik (left) is his contention that this is some sort of "moral victory". A victory implies a confrontation of some kind and as far as Pakatan is concerned, their 'deer caught in the headlights' stance in no way constitutes a fight. If this is a victory, it is mired in the usual Umno shadow play or worse belongs to those who are vilified as puppets to agendas beyond their control.

Here's hoping that Pakatan discovers the 'fight' in them when it comes to changing

the books on a state level when it comes to this issue, which would be a kind of 'moral redemption'.

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