

## **BN-Pakatan battle lines clearly and starkly drawn**

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COMMENT If the general election is a war of collision, then the lead-up to it must be a battle of attrition.

The prelude to the country's 14th general election has already commenced and it has all the hallmarks of the gritty hand-to-hand combat, thrust and counter-thrust features that distinguish a long drawn-out campaign from a brief and intensive burst of hostilities.

Democracy's purists would prefer that a general election be a brief period of distemper in the body politic for which the ballot would be the balm that pacifies.

But the outcome of last May's 13th general election is in dispute, so it's hardly a surprise that the prelude to the 14th has already begun in deadly earnest.

As developments spur and twist, as manoeuvres are crafted and executed, initial features of the BN's strategy towards opponents Pakatan Rakyat are quite clear: de-legitimise the DAP and sow dissension in PAS.

lim kit siang dap election ballotIn a sly move, the Registrar of Societies (ROS) is quoted as saying that he was disinclined towards alleged moves by members of the DAP that they be allowed to form a new party should the existing body be deregistered because of possible fraud in the counting of votes at the party's elective assembly last December.

The DAP has vehemently protested the notion that assorted members have suggested the formation of a new party as a way out of the flap over the vote-count at their congress in Penang seven months ago.

The party has threatened to file a defamation suit against the ROS for allegedly fabricating the story that there has been a move from some of its members to attempt to form a new entity as a way out of the imbroglio foisted on the party for the technical glitch in the counting of votes that saw slight changes to the initial results of the party election a month after the actual vote had taken place.

The ROS is viewed by the opposition in the same light as the Election Commission - as adjuncts of the powers-that-be.

Expecting the registrar to comport himself with balance and objectivity towards Pakatan would be about as realistic as to expect the same treatment from the mainstream media towards the opposition.

PAS link to Shia Islam

Things simply don't happen that way, which brings us, in talking about the mainstream media, to the other strand in the strategy of the BN towards the Pakatan component - PAS - that has been targeted for disruption through the sowing of internal dissension.

Mainstream media reports on the spread of the influence of the Shia branch of Islam appear targeted at pinning the blame for its proliferation on PAS.

Because PAS deputy president Mohamad Sabu has been meeting with Shia leaders on his trips abroad, it is being bruited about that he is clad in the raiment of that branch of the religion which is seen as suspect by the overwhelming majority of Muslims in Malaysia who are adherents of the Sunni branch.

NONE'Mat' Sabu (right) is the most ecumenical of Muslim leaders, with an approach that tends towards bridge-building rather than differentiation.

His believes in engagement with all who are motivated by goodwill to improve the commonweal. This accounts for his popularity among a polyglot citizenry riven by race and religion.

His lack of the religious learning that is prized by his party makes him suspect among its ulama.

It is being whispered on the grapevine that his defeat in the parliamentary seat of Pendang, in Kedah, was partly due to internal sabotage; elements in PAS want him weakened for his battle to retain the deputy president's post at his party's elective assembly in November.

The stories of the spread of Shia Islam in Malaysia and its imputed links to Sabu are part of an overall campaign to pull the rug from under the feet of the wing of the PAS that wants to engage with others more than merely lay down the line on what is permissible and what is not.

The stage is set

Thus by dangling the Damoclean sword of deregistration over the DAP and by

pushing PAS towards rigid orthodoxy, the stage is being set, in the long prelude to GE14, to drive Pakatan into greater ideological incoherence, with the possibility of a collapse in disarray.

Every stratagem in the book of political dirty tricks - and some out of it - will be used to drive a wedge into the opposition coalition so that it stutters into defeat by the time of GE14.

But by holding fast through two general elections in succession (GE12 and GE13), Pakatan has given cause to believe that that which unites them as a credible alternative to BN is greater than that which divides them into motley components of a disparate coalition.

It is said that political selection often entails a choice between the intolerable and the undesirable.

But after two general elections and in the long prelude to the next one, the chances are GE14 would offer voters a choice between reform-resistant BN, which would be intolerable, and a Pakatan that has performed in Penang and in Selangor desirably though not flawlessly.

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