

Pakatan must stay creative in the face of BN sterility

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COMMENT If creative politics is a pattern of inventive responses to society's inertia and small margin for change, then Pakatan Rakyat leader Anwar Ibrahim's call last week for a national dialogue among all political parties in the country is a step in the proactive vein.

Right now, the political situation in the country is at a standoff between a government that cannot garner credibility for its victory in the general election and an opposition that can shout but cannot shift the status quo.

najib hari raya open house pc 080813 02Word on the grapevine says that the unity government overtures from the Najib Abdul Razak administration to PKR failed because it was seen as an attempt to split the unity of Pakatan Rakyat by drawing away from its fold the party that holds the opposition coalition together.

The political charade of that maneuver was highlighted by the denials that an offer was made in the first place which issued from some quarters of the Najib administration after it became obvious that the overture had no chance of success.

To these quarters, post-failure denial is imperative to sustain the fiction that the BN victory does not need any more authenticity than what the parliamentary arithmetic provides it.

But the fact that the overture to PKR was made underscored the point about the BN victory's want of credibility and the corresponding need to shore it up with a tie-up with PKR that would disintegrate the opposition.

That PKR spurned the offer reflected the strength of the underlying consensus in Pakatan that the majority of voters wanted change and felt that the opposition coalition was the better vehicle by which to realise it.

Prior to the general election, Pakatan had to contend with the perception that the coalition's unity was a matter of mere expedience, and was not anything more substantive.

Impelled towards unity

NONESure, the secularity of DAP consorted uneasily with the theocratic inclinations

of PAS but as time wore on, it became more and more evident that voters' desire for political reform and change exerted a dynamic on the nature of the inter-party relations within Pakatan.

The pull of this dynamic impelled Pakatan towards unity as leaders within the coalition sensed that the tide of voter sentiment in favor of change was strong enough to compel those doubting the viability of the opposition to submerge their doubts.

True, the continuing success of the Pakatan state governments in Penang and Selangor helped sustain the belief that it was not mere political expedience that accounted for their both state administrations' viability.

Something stronger - a shared desire to prove that the opposition could provide better governance to a populace long starved of it - has also been at work in welding the coalition together.

NONEPakatan's Anwar is fond of citing the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset on the need not to underestimate the intelligence of the masses.

Fifty-one percent of those who voted in the general election marked their ballots for change.

Extrapolating from this, one can contend that a majority of the electorate wants Pakatan to stay together.

Leading off from here, one can also argue that the decision of PKR to spurn the offer of a tie-up with Umno-BN accords with the wishes of the majority of voters.

But people are apt to become bored with a standoff which is why Anwar's call for a national dialogue on the daunting array of problems facing the nation - from the threat of national insolvency, mounting crime, debased education, racial and religious tensions, and endemic corruption - is a proactive response to the prevalent stagnation in national affairs.

The call has elicited contempt from Umno quarters, but that is only to be expected. These quarters have deprecated the need for a dialogue and have said whatever needs be discussed and debated ought to be done in Parliament.

Are they not in danger of underestimating the intelligence of the masses which voted for change and who know that their push for it has been stalled by a gerrymandered electoral process that has yielded in parliamentary representation

skewed towards maintenance of the status quo rather than change?

In the next several weeks, if Umno-BN continues to be constrained by the combination of its lack of ideas and if it conducts governance in business-as-usual mode, the need for more creative responses from Pakatan would require it to come with something to refresh the political script.

There is no need to let the cat out of the bag before its time, but to set the feline among the pigeons is a necessity in the face of a static situation whose sterility will be off-putting to voters.

The maintenance of voter interest is one of the deeper challenges of the current situation. Pakatan must demonstrate that it can be creative in the face of looming Umno-BN sterility and refusal to change.

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