

Pakatan breaks out of reflexive partisanship

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By Terence Netto

COMMENT Pakatan Rakyat broke out of the cycle of reflexive partisanship vis-à-vis the ruling Umno-BN over the weekend with a brace of initiatives that suggested, corporately or individually, the opposition is opting to be proactive - no matter if the BN elects to be otherwise.

NONEIf creative politics is a pattern of proactive responses to society's inertia and small margin for change, then the Pakatan initiatives, announced by Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang suggest that the opposition coalition is game for a refresh response where old ones have run their sterile course.

The DAP-led Pakatan government in Penang will allocate development funds to opposition wards and Hadi has invited Umno to a dialogue on issues of mutual concern, though not on the idea of a unity government between Pas and Umno.

Both initiatives, coming as they do before the second session of the 13th Parliament opens today, constitute a refreshing breakout by Pakatan, corporately or individually, from the dialogue of the deaf that has been the tenor of the exchanges between the two coalitions.

This cannot go on for long.

The results of GE13 indicate that the two-coalition system is here to stay.

This means in the parliamentary term, 2013-2018, it should not be business as usual - with the BN proposing and Pakatan reflexively opposing.

Taking the cue from an opinion poll released last week that said 67 percent of those surveyed wanted engagement between BN and Pakatan, the DAP-led Penang government has decided to allocate a sum of RM40,000 annually to each of the 10 state assemblypersons, all from Umno, for development purposes in their wards.

Also, over the weekend, Hadi announced that PAS is willing to talk with Umno on issues of mutual concern, though not on the matter of forging a unity government.

NONEThe annual allocation for opposition wards in Penang and the dialogue with

Umno proposition by PAS must be seen as a continuum with the call for a national dialogue between BN and the opposition that was made by Anwar Ibrahim on Aug 30.

The Opposition Leader had proposed the dialogue in his Merdeka Day address but it quickly ran into a drumfire of criticism from Umno that it was indicative of desperation.

Where it did not attract criticism, the call was misinterpreted as indication of interest in forming a unity government between BN and PKR, though Anwar had been at pains to say, when making the dialogue proposal, that this was not so.

No doubt, Hadi's call for a dialogue between Umno and his party will be misinterpreted by some quarters as a call for a unity government between PAS and Umno.

Higher level of maturity

If both DAP and PKR refrain from expressing qualms about the PAS initiative, the restraint will mirror the prevalence of a higher level of maturity among the component parties of Pakatan.

Each Pakatan component party knows that it needs the other two of its partners more than it needs Umno-BN.

Hence that which unites them as a credible opposition coalition with aspirations to become an alternative choice of government is greater than that which separates them as individual components with disparate ideologies.

FULL WIDTH 435 pxThe components may differ in ideology but 51 percent of the electorate at GE13 held that that which separates Pakatan is not as significant as that which unites them: a strong deference to the desire of the majority of Malaysians for equity, justice and good governance.

Yesterday, Lim gave concrete form to this yen for equity and good governance by announcing developmental allocations for opposition representatives in Penang on the basis that people in the opposition-supporting wards also have a right to allocations from the public purse, a right that Umno-BN have obdurately denied all these years to wards held by the opponents.

In tandem with Lim's mature recognition, Hadi has made it clear that his dialogue proposal with Umno does not encompass the notion of a unity government with

Umno. PKR and DAP ought to take the PAS leader at his word.

Although a conclave of ulama in Alor Star the weekend before last had proposed that PAS review its ties with PKR, the call has seemingly not garnered the support that it was intended to elicit.

The reaction within PAS was that, well, the party can review its ties with PKR but the re-examination will not result in a severance of ties.

All in all, last weekend suggested that Pakatan, corporately and individually, is set to chart new waters by breaking out of reflexive partisanship.

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