

Pakatan's 'Allah' waffle is self-defeating

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COMMENT It hasn't take long for someone from the Pakatan Rakyat leadership cohort to realise that the opposition coalition's position on the 'Allah' issue is a waffle and that it's going to lose them votes.

It is also not a surprise that that someone is PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli. Schooled as he is in the science of rational choice, the Pandan MP has become the first Pakatan leader to publicly admit that the coalition's stand is unsustainable.

On Monday, at a public forum on electoral trends, he aired the view that Pakatan's wariness over the issue has allowed Umno to exploit fears among Malays that Islam is under threat.

"If we (Pakatan) continue being calculative, indecisive and wishy-washy about our position, we are basically a sitting lame duck in the next two-three years," he asserted.

"We are falling into the hands of Umno who believe the racial and religious elements are the crux they can play on to maintain power.

"There needs to be serious soul-searching and contemplation within the Pakatan leadership, including myself, to find out how exactly we want to face this monster.

"It is not going to be easy and will cost us electoral support, not so much because we need to defend one community over the other or one religion over the other but it is a matter of principle."

Rafizi did not intimate by which principle Pakatan is to resolve its ambiguity, though the solvent lay in the theme that has run like a leitmotif throughout PKR's campaign at least over the last six years: 'Merdekakan Rakyat' (Emancipate the People).

Emancipate the people from what? Ignorance, of course.

That PKR and, by extension, Pakatan appear petrified by the spell that Umno-BN have cast over the nation, through the twin riddles of race and religion, it only confirms the potency of the bewitchment.

If Malaysians appear right now to be writhing in the cumulative throes of more than a half-century's bewitchment by Umno-BN, Pakatan's Aladdin Lamp must be the light that dispels the darkness.

The power of the spell cast on the body politic by the riddles of race and religion of Umno's concoction has been such that even Pakatan is distracted from resort to the answering weapon of its choice: enlightenment, of self and citizenry.

Dissipate hate

While Rafizi was expatiating on Pakatan's unenviable predicament to a small crowd of listeners in one part of Kuala Lumpur, a few kilometres away in Petaling Jaya heavy rain delayed but could not douse an ardent discussion on the 'Allah' issue in the public hall of a library.

The crowd of about 300 was larger than expected, but it was its relative youth and ethnic composition - among the young, the Malays were the majority - that compelled attention.

It would be self-deluding to extrapolate broad conclusions from fragmentary evidence but from the tenor of the questions from the floor and the ethnicity of the questioners themselves, Umno's gambit of exploiting ignorance to gain electoral advantage on the 'Allah' issue can succeed only if people prefer ignorance to knowledge, obfuscation to enlightenment.

Umno's stance is not going to fly if people's preferences are the other way round, which is why Rafizi's intimation that Pakatan must sort out its position soon and come clear on it is sensible.

If the position is based on liberating the people from ignorance and if it is seen to lose the opposition coalition votes from those caught in Umno's entrapment, then that loss should be regarded as temporary only.

On the 'Allah' issue Pakatan's, especially PKR's, position should be founded on the assertion of truth, unveiling of illusion, the dissipation of hate and suspicion, and the enlargement and instruction of the rakyat's hearts and minds.

Otherwise its proclaimed goal - necessitous and laudable - of emancipating of the people from Umno-BN's stultifying bondage will have bypassed its first target which is its own self.

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