

Pakatan not savvy vis-a-vis T'ganu Umno's troubles
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COMMENT It is said finality is not the language of politics simply because the latter is about human affairs. That makes ambiguity and indeterminateness inescapable; hence flexibility rather than finality is the way to cope.

In politics, a shrewd ambiguity about what one means is of greater assistance, especially when navigating febrile currents as were said to be swirling around Terengganu politics latterly.

The PAS commissioner for the state, Satiful Bahri Mamat (right in photo), chose to speak in unsuitably terminal accents when asked about his party's reaction to the news of defections of state reps to the independent bench from the ruling Umno's ranks.

Yesterday evening, Satiful was quoted in Malaysiakini as saying "... we are not interested in courting them" with reference to news reports that at least three Umno assemblypersons had declared themselves as Independents.

Within hours of Satiful's forbidding declaration, web news portals began putting it out that Umno was reporting the return to their fold of two of the three assemblypersons who were earlier said to be defecting to the Independent benches.

The kind of squawking that sounded from Satiful was enough to make Umno birds nervously twittering in their nests to opt for the safety of hearth rather than brave the uncertainties of adventure.

One could have guessed, from the way he reacted to the reported defections, about the ideological preferences of Satiful, the PAS assemblyperson for Paka within the party's fold - he is hawkish over hudud.

Only those who see things in monochromes would be unable to see that where there appeared to be peril for Terengganu Umno when Ahmad Said was replaced as their menteri besar earlier this week, triggering a destabilising flurry, there were glimmers of opportunity for the opposition Pakatan Rakyat.

It does not necessarily mean that seeing such opportunities entails the sacrifice of one's principles. Not for nothing is it said about politics that it is the art of the possible.

Seeing human affairs in shades of grey

A sensibility that's inured to seeing human affairs in monochromes and not for what it is, as

shades of grey requiring delicate selection of the one over the other, is apt to be inflexible when dealing with the range.

Unfortunately, the weakness is not just confined to the literalist-minded like Satiful.

Some PKR types in Kuala Lumpur also displayed inflexibility, albeit of a lesser hue.

Some of the defection-contemplating elements from Umno approached Terengganu PKR leader, Azan Ismail (left), the sole PKR assemblyperson in the state, to talk about possible scenarios if the would-be defectors were to form a new party and link up with PKR and PAS to make a new state government, the word from the PKR headquarters was akin to a splash of cold water.

The PKR headquarters were not in the mood to encourage defections.

Perhaps there was nobody in the HQ detached enough from the troubles that have bedeviled the ongoing internal election process in the party to think constructively on how to leverage on Umno's troubles in Terengganu.

Perhaps PKR being bland and blasé about possible Umno defections in Terengganu is the legacy of the public chastisement the party and its de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim had to endure in February 2009 when the late DAP chairperson, Karpal Singh, angrily scolded them for encouraging elected federal legislators in Sarawak and Sabah to defect to Pakatan.

The spectacle was a huge embarrassment to PKR because two of their elected reps, with one from the DAP, had just then crossed over to the Independent benches in the Perak state assembly, triggering a constitutional crisis that eventually led to the deposing of the Pakatan state government led by Nizar Jamaluddin.

The whole sordid affair was a scalding experience for PKR. They have been licking their wounds since.

As for PAS, the confident assertion of Satiful Bahri that the dominant Malay/Muslim electorate in Terengganu would be only too glad to re-embrace his party and its hudud agenda if a snap election is held as a result of defections from Umno shows how easy it is for the ideologically-minded to be ahistorical.

Most observers of Malaysian general elections since the 1999 one when PAS did well to maintain their grip in Kelantan and take over Terengganu would assert that PAS lost the latter to Umno in the 2004 elections because of the incompetence of the party and voter anxiety over their determination to go ahead with hudud.

Not only is finality not the language of politics, but amnesia about political history means one is condemned to repeat mistakes.

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