

'Unmitigated disaster' looms for PKR
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COMMENT With him digging his heels in for the long haul, Pakatan Rakyat will discover that the remaining time on Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim's watch may well turn out as Chandra Muzaffar predicted an Anwar Ibrahim premiership would: an "unmitigated disaster."

That apocalyptic prediction, aired with days to go to General Election 12 (GE12) in March 2008, made the flesh of the then rapidly coalescing opposition to Umno-BN creep horribly.

Never mind that the former deputy president of PKR's precursor, Parti Keadilan Nasional, had quit - in circumstances more to do with ego than with principle - after a few years' residence in the party he had helped found in 1999.

Never mind, too, that his leaving had strengthened the reputed theory that intellectuals tend to be more bane than boon to a fledgling political party.

When Chandra (left) regressed to the extent of his truculent denigration of the moving force behind the reformasi movement on the eve of what was seen as a pivotal decision by the Malaysian electorate, his renunciation rankled like a case of apostasy of a prominent follower would in a Muslim community.

Several years down the road from its airing, Chandra's dire prognostication of how an Anwar premiership would turn out is being played out in the saga of Khalid Ibrahim's MB-ship of Selangor.

In the last few weeks, even as it has become increasingly evident that Khalid has crossed the Rubicon in terms of some kind of accommodation with his own party with respect to his MB-ship, the notion that forces beyond Pakatan's ability to manage are at work to help Khalid keep his job has become a suppurating wound in its flanks.

The wound has to be cauterised

The longer it lies exposed to the elements that are out to undermine Pakatan so as to gain Umno-BN a return to power in the richest state in Malaysia, the more certain it will be that the 51.87% of the national electorate that voted Pakatan in May last year would not be encouraged to re-endorse the coalition at GE14, at least not the PKR and the PAS components of it.

At this juncture, both parties appear decidedly unreliable as trustees of the cause of political and economic reform of the country that the reformasi movement, galvanized by

Anwar Ibrahim's travails, had raised hopes for.

PAS's insistence on implementing hudud in Kelantan and Anwar's (right) seeming ineptitude vis-à-vis internecine feuding in PKR have combined to erode confidence in the two Pakatan components.

Only the DAP, in the tripartite Pakatan, appears steadily adherent to prior agreed goals of the coalition; by comparison, PAS and PKR are flaky.

Seeing as voters had how easily a PKR appointee as MB can turn out to be a quisling and keeping in mind that the top ranks of the party are riddled with former Umno types cannot be very encouraging to voters who had cottoned on to the idea that Umno-BN's more than half-century rule had decayed irredeemably.

Khalid has to be jettisoned if the Pakatan government in Selangor is to renew its claims to the allegiance of those who voted for it in 2008 and 2013.

But the signs are that Khalid has dug in for the long haul.

He has done so in the belief he has the support of not only Umno-BN, but also some quarters of Pakatan component PAS.

The latest indications of support for Khalid emanating from PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang tend to confirm that PAS has learned nothing from its troubles in Kedah in the 2010-12 spell when their MB, Azizan Abdul Razak, was under pressure from within the party's ranks to quit.

Hadi and company declined to give an incompetent MB the coup de grace just like how they are refusing now to cashier Khalid.

The upshot: Kedah was lost to Umno-BN, with five parliamentary seats – three held by PAS and two by PKR – reverting to Umno.

The longer Khalid is allowed to thumb his nose at the forces within Pakatan that want him out, the more certain it is that recriminations will mount in the PKR quarter at least, which would prompt critics from among that lot to muse on the magnitude of the misjudgment that has seen a man like Khalid morph into what he has become: a fifth columnist in PKR's ranks.

Early signs of political ineptitude

To be sure, Khalid had shown troubling signs of political ineptitude on the very morning after Pakatan captured power in Selangor on March 8, 2008.

He began discussing with Dr Hasan Ali, the then PAS chief in Selangor, the possibility of that man becoming deputy to him as MB.

What was egregious about that move was that Hassan had the previous night been in negotiations with Mohamad Khir Toyo, the Umno-BN MB unseated by the Pakatan win in Selangor.

The negotiations, premised on an Umno-PAS unity government for Selangor, broke down over Hassan's insistence on being the MB-designate.

A man of vaulting and dangerously unmanageable ambition, Hasan would go on to create a lot of tension in the Pakatan government in Selangor until PAS put an end to his dissidence by sacking him in January 2012.

Khalid had no clue on how to bring to heel a person whose overweening ambition he had unwittingly spurred.

Anwar has a clue on how to dispose of Khalid, but it appears he can't get PAS to sign on.

If PAS cannot be persuaded to endorse the removal of Khalid, then the leader who was the principal adhesive in the, hitherto, improbable coalition between secular DAP and theocratic PAS will have been gravely undermined by one from his own quarter. The irony is too bitter for comment.

It will seem for far too often in his career such that one can draw a damaging inference, Anwar can't quite tell friend from foe.

There is a reason why he can't; let's leave that for another time. Suffice the flaw is of the gravest magnitude.

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