

PAS infighting could benefit the nation
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ANALYSIS Since the 13th general election, cracks have begun showing in PAS' direction- where overtures of forming a unity government with BN and implementing hudud law in Kelantan had been heard at regular intervals.

But is this a problem that has cropped up only after the election?

Fact is, PAS has long been divided into two factions. The underlying theme for the first faction, which generally referred to as the pro-unity government faction, is that PAS is a direct "replacement" of Umno on the Malay ground.

The other faction is contained by "progressives", politicians who believe PAS should serve "everybody" in the country as a mainstream political party.

The cracks appeared after the general election mainly because more members from the first faction now hold elected office positions compared to the scenario after the 12th general election, when more members of the "progressive" group were elected and hence, able to sing in tune with Pakatan Rakyat.

Now the voices of the traditional PAS leaders, who are considering breaking away from Pakatan and that a collaboration with Umno is a real "possibility", have become louder.

Even so, if PAS were to break away from Pakatan, this is not a change that will happen overnight.

Not everyone in PAS will vote in favour of such a proposal, and this could lead to extended period of infighting and debate within PAS itself. Coming at a time when PAS' unity and its relationship with its Pakatan partners looks more fragile than ever, PAS' credibility among the Pakatan supporters has hit a new low.

But a massive debate within PAS on which direction the Islamist party should take can only do good for Malaysia, and for Pakatan Rakyat.

"Since Reformasi days itself, these two streams have existed within PAS. There will be a major internal fight they will have to go through before they break away from Pakatan," a highly experienced political observer, who declined to be named, told Malaysiakini.

But, for the observer, this is fight that not only PAS, but Malaysians as a whole "must face".

"The debate is PAS is good for the country, in a way," he further said.

The underlying argument here is that the country has been constantly beset by right-wing opinions and pressures which often negate the sloganeering of the BN government, no matter how moderate the government tries to appear.

Pakatan built on clarity

Before the opposition coalition, which was formed due to demands of the people at a time when discontent towards BN was high, can take over Putrajaya, it must do so with a “clear vision”.

“This fight will clarify what sort of Malaysia we want. It will also clarify Pakatan Rakyat’s own vision,” he said.

Of course, the noises made by the most ulama wing within PAS can be suppressed for now. But as shown after GE13, those noises will only be stifled for a while.

The leaked conversation yesterday showed one thing for certain, that PAS central committee members’ Mohd Zuhdi Marzuki (right) is not an isolated figure in his opinions and there must have been other PAS leaders who had bounced on the idea for such an “scenario” to be put forward.

The fact that one member felt it appropriate to use such a condescending language in addressing non-Muslims, even if it’s a closed forum, begs another question- how many of the PAS leaders were comfortable listening to that tone and language used to address non-Muslims and also DAP?

The last thing Malaysians or Pakatan Rakyat needs is for them to win Putrajaya in the next general election but then have “right-wing” voices come up to besiege the administration in the same way Malay rights group Perkasa and Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (Isma) have been doing under the BN administration.

The excuses would be all too familiar- PAS will need to keep their grassroots happy, thus there will be attempts to play down the extreme sentiments, while not taking stern action against it.

The extremists can hold PKR and DAP to ransom by extension, the same way Perkasa and Isma has been piling pressure on the BN government.

With their administration in Selangor currently in limbo, Pakatan cannot afford to plant any more seeds of doubt on how they would be able to manage an entire country while staying united as a coalition.

“Maybe, without PAS, Pakatan won’t have the strength to win GE14, but maybe their grounds can be established and built up for the next election. But this is important because you will have clarity. A Pakatan Rakyat built on clarity is better than not having clarity,” the

observer noted.

PAS back to being a Kelantan party

One of BN's major accusations against Pakatan all these years were that they are coalition formed "out of convenience".

But BN themselves cannot claim to hold a moral high ground when it comes to becoming a coalition of convenience. Yet, BN is still in power and the coalition, in so many ways, had stayed intact despite offering mixed signals.

BN's resolve as a coalition will only be tested if it is no longer forms the federal government. But at the same time, Pakatan has the timely opportunity to prove that it is has more to offer, and isn't built merely on the flimsy platform of convenience.

While this might mean sacrificing their short-term ambitions, this could benefit the country in the long-term.

"If PAS works with Umno, PAS is leaving national politics, and they will go back to being a Kelantan party," the observer added.

The people's movement, which in turn resulted in a slew of civil society movements, and which hold BN more accountable for their governance, was done with the intention of installing a better government, be it BN or Pakatan, in the federal power.

But if Pakatan sweeps the growing noises within PAS under the carpet and fails, for the umpteenth time, to start a debate about the matter, questions will be asked as to whether Pakatan can offer anything better than BN in leading the country.

PAS must now prove that it is beyond sloganeering as well, and DAP's Klang MP Charles Santiago believes that if PAS does leave the coalition, it stands to lose "all the urban seats it has won before".

"This is very scary (possibility of the collaboration with Umno) and worrying. The tone is compromising the rights of the minority.

"If this continues, PAS will be the biggest loser," he added.