

**Is Pakatan a formal institution or feudal whim?**  
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COMMENT There exists a simple, fundamental question amidst the crisis now tearing Pakatan Rakyat apart: how are decisions in Pakatan made?

My last article discussed the confusion arising from conflicting signals after the last major Pakatan meeting.

By way of brief recap: Anwar Ibrahim, Lim Guan Eng, and Mohammed Sabu met, then announced that they had received PKR's proposal to change menteri besar in Selangor, and that they would go back to their respective parties for discussion on the matter.

PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang soon after announced that PAS' position was for Abdul Khalid Ibrahim to stay on as menteri besar, a position echoed by PAS spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

Thereafter, PKR's Saifuddin Nasution says that this runs counter to the decision already made at the first meeting mentioned to replace Khalid.

Then, an obvious question that follows is: if the decision is already made, what need was there for each of the leaders to go back and consult with their parties, as announced in the press statement following that meeting?

Yes, Zuhdi is a bigot

Many controversies have since followed this breakdown, creating a great deal of sound and fury.

Needless to say, that which caught the most attention were the racist and bigoted views of Mohd Zuhdi Marzuki, as revealed in the leaked Whatsapp group chat among PAS central committee members.

There is no doubt that the views of Zuhdi (left), as captured in the widely circulated screenshot, represent the worst type of divisive thinking that can be found in Malaysian politics.

However, equating Zuhdi to the whole of PAS would be like equating Ibrahim Ali to the whole of Malaysia.

As we understandably raise a hue and cry over this controversy, it would be a mistake for us to ignore the bigger problems that are surfacing.

## Institutional failure

I hypothesise that one major reason Pakatan is now facing this complete breakdown is because it never invested in institutional strength.

The formal structure of Pakatan most closely resembles the internal chaos of PKR, which also has no institutional strength, and a complete dearth of standard operating procedures or due process.

The decision-making process in Pakatan is frightfully similar to that found in PKR - haphazard, given to whims and fancies and never quite the same twice.

I vaguely recall the institution referred to as the 'Pakatan Rakyat Presidential Council'. What I really cannot tell, for the life of me, is who exactly sits on this council.

I know that both PAS and PKR technically have a president. They also have a *nursyidul am*, or spiritual leader, and a *ketua umum*.

The spiritual leader seems to almost never be involved, while the *ketua umum* seems to go to the meetings he wants to attend, while sending his wife to the meetings he does not want to attend.

DAP has a secretary-general, who everyone knows is the real godfather calling every single shot in the party. But it also has a chairperson, whose function (and the current office holder) are not known to me, off the top of my head.

The DAP also has Lim Kit Siang, who sometimes sits in these Pakatan presidential council meetings, representing DAP, though in what capacity exactly I cannot say.

My impression is that the exact composition of the presidential council is unclear and not sent in stone, giving the impression that when Anwar wants a certain result, he invites certain people and not others - a theory which would certainly explain how it was that Anwar loyalist Mohamad Sabu was the one representing PAS at the meeting mentioned at the start of the article.

## The taint of Anwar's feudalism

Given every movement he has been involved in, it is doubtful Anwar has ever believed in putting institutional strength ahead of political expediency. To him, what is important is not building institutions and political culture that will outlast individuals, but to manipulate existing institutions and culture to benefit the individual number one: himself.

Khalid, it is worth noting, is the exact opposite. His principles are founded strongly in the belief that good governance is about setting up institutions and political culture that not only outlasts individuals, but by definition, curb the ability of individuals to abuse the

system.

I think this difference between feudalism and institutionalism goes a long way in explaining how and why Anwar is willing to risk burning Pakatan to the ground around him just to remove Khalid.

The taint of Anwar's haphazardness has clearly reached Pakatan, causing the coalition to have no proper procedures or reliable formal decision making processes.

If it did, they clearly would not be in the mess they are in. Instead, they would have a clear forum for binding decisions to be made, eliminating any confusion in favour of genuine transparency.

Anwar and Pakatan cannot only talk of consensus when it suits them, and yet try to bulldoze things through and cast aspersions on their allies when there is in fact no consensus to change a status quo. Consensus means when three for three parties agree, not rule by majority.

Everyone is now pointing fingers at one another in the blame game now consuming Pakatan, with many relying on their own personal political preferences rather than objective analysis.

Nonetheless, I think that no matter who your political idol is, it should be obvious that there has been an abject failure by Pakatan to install the kinds of institutions and due processes that would have averted this disaster.

Any future movement for change in Malaysia should take heed of this calamity, and recognise the need for formal and consistent decision-making processes. Even though they may make the short term more difficult, that path is the only sustainable way forward in the long term.

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