

## **Where will PAS be, without Pakatan?**

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COMMENT The six million dollar question on everyone's mind now is: Where would PAS be without Pakatan Rakyat, and vice versa?

Of late, PAS has been a thorn in the flesh for the Pakatan coalition over the menteri besar crisis in Selangor. Its president, Abdul Hadi Awang, made a number of statements that sparked more controversies than provided straightforward solutions to the crisis.

I believe, at this juncture, the sentiments of Pakatan supporters from both within PAS and the other component parties remain high, especially with the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in April 2015. The GST will affect mainly the lower income groups, who will be hard-pressed and are likely throw their support to Pakatan.

After the momentum has been set and with the Pakatan forming state governments in a number of states in the peninsular, it is hard to turn the clock backwards. Now, the people have hope, after they see how unity can turn any impossible situation into reality.

However, can PAS go without Pakatan? Let's look at this first question.

PAS has its roots way back to the time when Umno was set up by Onn Jaafar. However, the organisation was only renamed Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) in the 1970s during the Asri Muda era.

As we know, PAS was part of the BN government for five years from 1973 to 1978 under the leadership of Asri Muda. It was no bed of roses for PAS and they soon realised that both Umno and PAS could never co-exist together. PAS leaders were sidelined in the same manner MIC, MCA and Gerakan leaders are sidelined. By 1978, they were out of BN.

Now, going by the news reports, for Hadi to suggest a unity government in Selangor with Umno where Azmin Ali (right) would helm the state government as the new menteri besar replacing Khalid Ibrahim, is he once again leading PAS into the same path that it had gone before?

This is unlikely to happen, given that its spiritual leader, Tok Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat, is still alive but, assuming that the existing leaders do not do anything about it now, they may risk repeating the same mistake.

The rival parties in BN will undoubtedly plant its people in PAS in order to goad it in this direction.

If it happens, it is not wrong to say that history keeps repeating itself because people

simply fail to learn from their mistakes.

Once PAS is absorbed into BN, it will no doubt play second fiddle to Umno. Unless PAS is willing to dissolve itself, and its members join Umno, it is unlikely that PAS will survive for another five years.

As clearly seen from the example of the Hindraf movement, its chief, P Waythamoorthy (left), learnt the hard way that he, too, could not last more than a year within the deeply ingrained BN culture, where Umno warlords continue to dominate.

Umno may try to appease its stepbrother but at the expense of other component parties. PAS should not forget that it is not only the DAP that is against the implementation of hudud, but also MCA, Gerakan and MIC.

In Sabah and Sarawak, the other BN component parties are just as strongly against the implementation of hudud. Therefore, as PAS has taken cognisance recently, it is not time yet to implement hudud.

What is apparent in recent years is that newspapers belonging to BN political parties are the biggest propagandist against the hudud. Even the case of a couple issued a compound in Kelantan due to proximity was reported as a 'hudud' controversy by a local English daily, when people like me were thinking, "What hudud? You do the same in the Kuala Lumpur Lake Gardens, City Hall will also fine you!"

PAS should also not forget the Memali incident, where its name has been dragged through the mud, leaving behind the impression that PAS equals the Taliban.

At least, this was the impression I had through the years, until Pakatan came into being and I began to see PAS in a new light.

Second fiddle

Back to the second fiddle role, in constituencies like Paya Jeras, which is for the first time won by Selangor PAS secretary, Mohd Khairuddin Othman, do you think Umno would allow Khairuddin to contest in Paya Jeras, which is traditionally an Umno seat?

In other constituencies with a Malay majority, would Umno give up the seat for its stepbrother to contest? Certainly, not!

Ultimately, it boils down to political survival should a crisis broke out between the two parties, and Umno would want to still have a bigger number of seats under its control.

Khairuddin won the Paya Jeras seat because of two factors: the Pakatan spirit was high during the last general election and voters who would traditionally vote DAP voted for PAS. Khairuddin would not be there in the Selangor State Assembly without the framework of cooperation in Pakatan.

PAS leaders have to take cognizance that nothing short of anti-Umno sentiment would help to boost its presence in Parliament.

Unless PAS wants to return to Kelantan to be the 'jaguh kampung', it has to learn from the current developments where there are attempts to split the Pakatan coalition.

Learn from history

In 1999, when PAS allied itself with the DAP and Keadilan to form Barisan Alternatif, PAS was able to take over Terengganu from the BN. Hadi became the menteri besar of Terengganu, but only for one term.

The sentiments in those days were strong after Anwar Ibrahim was arrested, and thrown into prison. It cannot be disputed that such sentiments will rise again, should Anwar be imprisoned.

With Anwar in prison, it was his wife, Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (left), whom I am guessing, reluctantly helmed Keadilan. A woman of substance, she held the fort for many years until Anwar was released.

However, when Barisan Alternatif was dissolved and the three parties went their own ways, in 2004 general election, PAS's strength was greatly diminished. It won only seven parliamentary seats, down from its 27 parliamentary seats in the 1999 general election. Why?

I do not need to answer that question, because the answers are, as Bob Dylan's song says, 'Blowing in the Wind'.

Umno/BN's strategists were successful in throwing the spanner in the works to cause Barisan Alternatif (and previously, Semangat 46) to split. BN triumphs because it is damn good at implementing its 'divide and rule' strategy.

It is noteworthy to put on record that, besides losing Terengganu, even Hadi lost his parliamentary seat in 2004 and PAS retained control of Kelantan with only a slim majority of 24 out of 45 seats.

Today, he is president of the party, but he should reflect over the reason why he lost his parliamentary seat.

Further, the party's majority in Kelantan's state assembly was reduced to 23 seats when it lost the Pengkalan Pasir by-election in 2005. Left with only a majority of only one seat, Nik Aziz has to work extra hard at keeping the state together.

Assuming this is another hypothetical situation: PAS is absorbed into BN, and they have to leave the coalition once again as it did in the 1970s, where would PAS stand?

Would it have to return to Kelantan, and no longer be considered a national political party that can contribute to the country's political development?

When that happens, the so-called Erdogans or the more educated and enlightened members of PAS, who are pro-Pakatan may shift allegiance and join PKR or the DAP. Young people like Dyana Yusof have preferred DAP. PAS could see an internal split but to what extent has yet to be seen.

Pakatan without PAS

Both Pakatan and PAS should not underestimate the powerful BN machinery that is constantly at work behind the scenes to create issues and try to win over the hearts of the people.

What would happen if Pakatan had not been formed in 2008? There would, once again, be a split of votes. This will give BN the big boost that it has sought for in the past two general elections.

If PAS went on its own, there could be a three-corner fight in many constituencies, and we know the outcome of such a formula: Umno vs PAS vs PKR. Umno's presence is a certainty, but it would be another Kota Damansara case.

Umno and BN supporters from other races will continue voting for Umno in the constituency. While PAS supporters will be loyal to their own party's choice of candidate, the Pakatan supporters would vote for PKR.

As a whole, Umno will have the advantage. This is what happened in 2004 general election, when the mood swing following Dr Mahathir Mohamad's (right) resignation, gave Umno and BN the big boost. The then prime minister, Abdullah Badawi's more liberal attitudes was also a 'wow' factor for BN.

Looking back at the 2008 general election in retrospect, it was the result of three parties working together that we saw a political tsunami that has never happened in this country.

The people's sentiments were already ripe, especially after seeing Anwar and DAP's Lim Guan Eng being imprisoned, the rise of the Hindraf movement, as well as the Bersih demonstrations that were indiscriminately quashed by the powers that be.

PAS was able to make a comeback in its home state or Kelantan, winning 38 out of 45 seats, besides also taking control of the west coast state of Kedah.

In 2008, PAS, a 'jaguh kampung' in Kelantan, had its menteri besar in three states. In the same breath, Pakatan was able to form coalition governments in Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor, with PKR and DAP only having one state to itself.

PAS cannot complain that it was sidelined, but the coalition failed to outwit the BN strategists in holding both Perak and Kedah.

The onslaught was too great, and if Pakatan is split over the Selangor MB issue, the same fate may happen. This is why the rakyat are anxious to see the MB issue resolved, and if PAS has to go its own way, it is best done now.

True character

Those of us who used to support Khalid Ibrahim can now see the true character of the man and every respect for him is now gone. It appears now that he is only worth the support of 12 Umno members and such a shift of allegiance overnight simply does not make sense.

In 2008, PAS was able to win 23 parliamentary seats, nearly tripled its number in 2004. Because of this, Pakatan, under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim, was able to maintain a bigger presence in the august House.

The then Opposition leader, Lim Kit Siang (left), willingly gave up his parliamentary post to allow Anwar to take over. There was not even a murmur of discontentment over the PKR supremo leader taking over the post.

Fast forward, we see another political tsunami in 2013, which was conveniently blamed on the Chinese community.

Amidst this, the ghosts of another May 13 are out there to haunt the people, trying to pitch one community against another but the people of all races were united against the perpetrators.

Now that the Allah controversy has riled up both Sabah and Sarawakian Christians, and the prospect of Anwar being imprisoned again to finish him off, it is likely that the tsunami of both 2008 and 2013 could be turned into one major political earthquake by the 14th general election. Can component parties in Pakatan afford to part ways?

Yes, while Pakatan is saying that if it has no choice, it can go without PAS but the battle as we all know is an uphill one, even when PAS is part of the coalition.

Assuming that PAS is out, Pakatan comprising PKR and DAP will continue to place one Pakatan representative in each constituency.

If they win big, they will have the bigger majority. At the current figure, PKR and DAP may have roughly 40 seats each albeit with greater difficulty. And, PAS may still retain nine seats.

With 80 seats, Pakatan only needs slightly over 30 seats from Sabah and Sarawak to take over the federal government. Can this be achieved easily? Given the current state of affairs, both Sabah and Sarawak may yield a number of seats to Pakatan, but it may take another

decade before we see a change of the federal government.

Therefore, leaders of PAS and Pakatan would have to do some soul searching and come to terms with reality, instead becoming thorns to each other.

It is expected that in any organisation, there are bound to be differences in opinion, but with the people's hope now anchored on an alternative government, the three major component parties have no other option but to come to the drawing board together.

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