

Will PAS survive the Selangor MB row?

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COMMENT The Selangor menteri besar controversy has threatened to rip apart Pakatan Rakyat, the fledgling opposition bloc formed in the wake of the landmark 2008 general election.

But whether or not Pakatan survives the current storm albeit battered and bruised, the fact is that PAS appears to be in a more precarious position.

The Islamic party, which is the oldest amongst its allies, has been split over the issue, and the cracks continue to widen.

Its president Abdul Hadi Awang, the ailing spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and the clerics in the syura council are marching in a direction which the moderate forces in the party are opposed to.

Hadi's credibility has nosedived over the issue due to his many twists and turns, which have also tarnished the image of PAS as a principled and righteous political entity.

Over the past weeks, the party has come under intense criticism in the social media, with all sorts of labels - ranging from chauvinistic to deceitful - being pinned on the Islamic party.

Some even went to the extent of calling Hadi "a wolf in sheep's clothing", who, behind closed doors, is engineering a pact with Umno to form a unity government.

Then there are also those who claim that he is envious of Anwar Ibrahim, the result of a deep sense of animosity which can be traced back for decades when the two were rising Islamic leaders.

And it is this rivalry, the detractors alleged, is the root cause behind the PAS president's determination to prevent Anwar's wife and PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail from becoming menteri besar.

Like it or not, the undisputable fact is that Anwar, whose supporters hold key positions in PAS, made it possible for the Islamic party to expand its electoral reach, from being a provincial party to one with national ambitions.

Prior to Anwar's sacking, the reformasi movement and the formation of Pakatan, PAS was mostly a force in the rural Malay/Muslim heartlands as non-Muslims found its theocratic policies unsettling.

But much has changed since then. And PAS, which now goes by the slogan 'PAS for all', is able to garner votes from those who once shunned it.

PAS supporters indignant

Now, the menteri besar saga threatens to reverse its fortunes.

Whenever there is an internal dispute in Pakatan, PAS has never failed to remind its allies, especially the predominantly Chinese DAP, that the coalition would not be able to rope in Malay/Muslim votes without it.

However, the menteri besar imbroglio, where PAS dragged its foot over endorsing the choice of its Pakatan partners, has altered the political alignments.

After making a series of contradicting stands and renegeing on earlier agreements, observers pointed out that even some of PAS' Malay/Muslim supporters are balking over the machinations of top party leaders.

The actions, according to observers, bear a resemblance to the politics of Umno and disillusioned supporters might see no motivation to support PAS after this.

And now with talk of a new Islamic entity being mooted as an alternative political force to PAS, the future of the party hangs in the balance unless something drastic happens.

The question is, putting Pakatan aside, will PAS survive the MB saga?

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