

Pakatan should reframe rather than recriminate

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DAP is unhappy at the absenteeism of the PAS top leader and PAS is not happy at their boss being portrayed as a truant - a classic instance of mutual recrimination as prelude, perhaps, to a full blown quarrel and, maybe, even separation?

Yes and no.

Yes, the DAP's grouse over PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang's non-attendance at Pakatan Rakyat presidential council meetings is legitimate since Hadi has been known to publicly disagree with decisions after these have been made by the council.

For the PAS chief, it seems a case of, 'I wasn't there, therefore I can repudiate', which is a recipe for coalition disarray on major issues and decisions stemming from them.

No, an exchange of recriminations between two partners in a fledgling coalition is not necessarily an ominous portent of things to come, especially when both know that there's more to be gained from hanging on together than in going separate ways.

However, this does not detract from the gravity of the point the DAP secretary general Lim Guan Eng is intent on conveying through insistence on a principal leader's attendance at meetings and compliance with decisions made.

In short, he is saying there can be no retrospective nonconformity with decisions made by dint of a principal leader's non-attendance at meetings that discussed and decided them.

PAS's lesser lights find Guan Eng's public strictures over Hadi's nonconformity and non-attendance nettlesome.

First, party secretary general Mustafa Ali chided Guan Eng on his not-too-stellar attendance at Pakatan presidential meetings.

Later, information chief Mahfuz Omar said a recent bout of fragility in Hadi's health warranted commiseration rather than criticism for consequent non-attendance.

Concentration of power

Both Mustafa's and Mahfuz's extenuations for their boss missed the point Guan Eng was trying to make - that because so much decision-making authority inhered in the PAS supremo's hands, his attendance at Pakatan meetings was imperative.

If he does not attend, he has to delegate authority to his underlings and if he can't do that,

DAP would wait until Hadi is well before critical meetings of Pakatan are held.

The reasoning is clear and it is hard to take exception to it. But one feels that however crystalline the arguments, PAS will want elbow room for its president to weasel away from decisions the party feels do not conform to Islamic tenets.

This makes attendance or non-attendance a side issue, a red herring.

It's safer to re-focus on the essentials of policy between the partners of Pakatan and not let attention digress to the peripherals of attendance or non-attendance.

Thus the Common Policy Framework (CPF) which as long ago as 2009 bound the component parties of Pakatan in a common agenda upon which to fight GE13 must be called up, discussed, debated and agreed upon, with additions and subtractions, in preparation for GE14.

This is the more substantive issue and, if agreed to, can be made binding upon the coalition's components, unless of course a partner is not willing to be tied to it, in which case grounds exist for a parting of ways.

There are a little more than three years to GE14, enough time in which to re-focus on and reconstruct the CPF.

Return to the welfare state

Earlier this year, in wanting to impose hudud law in Kelantan, PAS was seen as departing from the CPF agreed to in 2009, even from the manifesto the party flaunted for GE13 which emphasised a welfare state as its main objective.

The party seems prone to be afflicted, from time to time, by ideological tics which see it revert to its moorings of faith.

It is disingenuous of the party to affect to be hurt when reminded by its secular-minded partners that such reversions are not permitted by the CPF.

Hence it is best for DAP to push for a reformulation of the CPF, such that it insulates Pakatan against reversions by PAS.

Realists may scoff at this attempt on grounds that PAS would regard adherence to Quranic imperatives as a transcendent duty and regard as nugatory any attachment to temporal pacts.

True, but the celestially-minded would have ultimately have to abide by terrestrial realities.

After PAS's defeat at the Pengkalan Kubor by-election (right) in Kelantan in September, the party's enthusiasm for hudud had notably diminished.

Its partners in Pakatan will have to rely on the dynamics of electoral realities to have the effect on PAS that Samuel Johnson envisaged for people who doubted the physical existence of things; the English sage proposed that they reassure themselves by kicking a rock.

Those who have trouble arriving at reality would find that their feet would tell them the truth.

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