

PAS hudud = Umno respite = Pakatan requiem
MalaysiaKini.com
Dec 16, 2014

COMMENT Umno, especially the part that's fulsome in support of its president, must presently feel great relief.

PAS, its Kelantan wing more precisely, is adamant on going ahead with the imposition of hudud law.

A special sitting of its state assembly on Dec 29 is scheduled to pass an amendment to a syariah enactment of 1993.

This will pave the way for the tabling of a private member's bill by PAS at the March sitting of Parliament for hudud's introduction in what the Kelantanese have long been proud to hail as 'Serambi Mekah' (Corridor to Mecca).

The bill possesses scant chance of succeeding in Parliament, given the secular inclinations of what is likely to be a bipartisan majority opposed to it.

But if the measure is pushed to culmination, it will scramble the coalition that sustains the ruling majority and sunder an opposition that's within sight of forming an alternative government.

But this will not matter to the bill's intended proponents.

It's in the nature of religious ideologues to prefer essence to existence, ideological constructs to the reality principle.

What the whole gamut of disruptive moves would do in the near term is render slack the noose presently tightening around Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak over the financial shenanigans of 1MDB, a misbegotten sovereign wealth fund whose impact threatens to be catastrophic enough to bring down his government.

The looming disaster ought to elate the opposition because Umno's more than half century's incumbency has, thus far, been resistant to the twin torpedoes of political failure and economic bankruptcy.

The racial and religious fault lines in the country, manipulated by the sitting government, is responsible for the reprieves pulled off once too many times by the incumbents.

But unrepentant political and economic failure feeds on itself. Before long it metastasises like cancer.

Because the 1MDB morass bites at a time when revenues from oil and gas are slumping,

debt and deficit levels escalating, and the government's mishandling of political and social issues debilitating, yet another escape from repudiation by the citizenry would only come from their recoil from insupportable alternatives.

The alternative to Umno-BN governance provided by a DAP-dominant Pakatan Rakyat in Penang and a PKR-led one in Selangor have been sufficiently superior in the last seven years to induce Malaysian voters to think of Pakatan as a credible alternative government.

Nearly 52 percent of them tilted in Pakatan's favor the last time they were asked for an opinion at the general election 19 months ago.

In that poll the coalition campaigned on an agenda outlined in the Common Policy Framework (CPF), a set of social democratic principles in a Pakatan dispensation where race and religion would not exert the divisive vibrations they have had in the country's history, particularly in recent decades.

Wobbling and weaving through a crisis

Bamboozled of victory in Election 2013, the Pakatan coalition wobbled and weaved its way through one major crisis - the saga of Khalid Ibrahim's replacement as Selangor menteri besar - and a host of lesser ones in the 19 months since.

But split asunder it did not.

This in spite of recurrent doubts about the solidity of the third Pakatan component's (PAS) adhesion to the CPF, considered the glue holding an ideologically disparate coalition together.

That despite the prevalence of those doubts the Pakatan alternative appeared increasingly compelling is in no small part due to Penang's and Selangor's continuing success against a backdrop of spiraling failure by Umno-BN in the rest of the country.

The latest evidence of this mess is the just released and scarcely credible report of the royal commission of inquiry (RCI) into the longstanding problems of illegal residents in Sabah.

The government in 2012 acquiesced to holding the RCI to ensure the vote of Sabah's indigenous natives stays with Umno-BN.

The vote stayed in Election 2012 but the credibility-lacking report of the RCI is certain to disperse it to the opposition in elections to come.

In Selangor, the continuing success of Pakatan governance under a new chief minister, Azmin Ali, is confirmation of how much easier it is for a Common Policy Framework-guided administration to be better than the Umno-BN alternative.

All this is now imperiled by Kelantan PAS's determination to go ahead with a measure that

is not in the CPF.

There was no prior notice of PAS's determination to go ahead with the special sitting of the Kelantan legislature on Dec 29, tacit acknowledgment perhaps of the unpopularity of the move among its erstwhile Pakatan Rakyat allies.

The controversy this move will generate is certain to divert the country's attention from matters where it should, more profitably for Pakatan, be fastened: on the metastasising failure of Umno-BN's governance, as evidenced by the 1MDB imbroglio and the RCI report on Sabah illegals.

Opposition leader and ostensible Pakatan supremo Anwar Ibrahim said he did not know in advance of the Kelantan meeting, and DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang predicts it will spell the coalition's demise.

The Deputy MB of Kelantan Mohd Amar Nik Abdullah says that DAP is free to leave Pakatan if it objects to hudud in Kelantan.

Repudiators want those calling attention to repudiation to quit. It's like arguing with the deaf.

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