

PAS moderates should break away now

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By Koon Yew Yin

COMMENT My advice to PAS conservative and “ulama” oriented or Umno-friendly members is that if you desert the coalition - whether on the hudud or other issues - and if you link up again in one way or another with Umno, then history will repeat itself.

And this history is that you will kill PAS and whatever political and moral credibility that it may have.

Several weeks ago I advised some friends from PAS that they should support the party through its difficulties and differences.

I also told them to be patient and to wait for the dust to settle after the party's coming elections due in June before deciding on their next move.

These friends – people like Nizar Jamaluddin (right), former Mentri Besar of Perak – are from the professional group within the party. This group consists of just as good and devout Muslims compared with the other faction of ulama or religious clerics.

What is important to point out is that they are independent and stand on their own two feet in their careers unlike many of the ulama who are dependent on tax payers' subsidies and religious collections from Muslims to support themselves and often, their multiple households.

Unlike the ulama too, the professional grouping in PAS is highly educated, multi-lingual and cosmopolitan. They have gained their degrees from respected western universities and not from some obscure religious university or institution.

These PAS professionals are moderate in their political ideology. They have lived with and interacted with non-Muslims.

They know that for Islamic parties to make their mark in our modern world, these parties must abide fully by the rules of democracy, and respect the universal human rights and freedoms subscribed to by all nations of the world since the end of World War 2.

Hence their goal is of a moderate Islam which upholds Islamic justice and is consonant with other universal systems and values. Such a value system does not include hudud in its priorities.

But this does not mean that they are less Islamic. It is just a recognition that there are many other more important issues and problems that the Islamic world needs to focus on, and not just the imposition of a religious system of criminal justice.

For the professionals, the priority – rightly - is to fight corruption, abuses and bad governance which has been rampant in Umno and BN. This is also the priority of most Malaysians.

This is the reason why many non-Malays and non-Muslims supported PAS candidates in the last two elections.

Unfortunately, we can see that the moderate group is not making much headway within PAS. Support for the professionals is being adversely affected by several factors.

The first is that with the death of spiritual adviser Nik Aziz Nik Mat (left), the torch of leadership has passed to PAS president Hadi Awang and other hardliners.

The second is that there is an Umno campaign pushing for a PAS-Umno union or rapprochement ahead of the coming general elections.

Hence great prominence is given to the views of Malay leaders who are in support of the union; and the so-called benefits of the union are argued in great detail for the benefit of the Malay grassroots through the Umno mouthpiece, Utusan Malaysia and TV3.

A third factor is that the moderates within PAS are being labeled as as traitors and deviants.

Gangster tactics are being used to rough up leaders such as Dzulkefly Ahmad and Dr Hatta Ramly.

There are ominous signs that the moderate faction may end up as the major loser after June when the PAS elections are over.

Future of PAS moderates

Concern for the wellbeing and future prospects of this very important moderate faction in PAS has been expressed by various commentators in the internet media.

To many Malaysians and for me, it is vital for our progress that this faction of PAS survives the present challenges and can grow in strength to overcome the ulama and other hardline and conservative factions in PAS and elsewhere in the country.

For this to happen, the following political scenario needs to take place.

-The PAS moderate and progressive faction will have to stand its ground on the hudud bill currently being tabled which Umno members are supporting. It also has to make its stand clear in the coming party elections.

-PasMa should focus on improving ties with its Pakatan partners, and together with PAS professionals must lead those opposed to the bill and Hadi Awang's hard line

pro-hudud leadership to break away from the party if the bill goes through.

-The breakaway PAS grouping of moderates should join Pakatan as a new member, replacing PAS Lama which is likely to join Umno ahead of the coming general elections. This will mean that the opposition coalition will remain intact in terms of its three major component parties and be freed from the burden of supporting the hudud bill which will kill off Pakatan's non-Malay as well as Malay votes should it see the light of day.

Should this scenario become reality, I am confident that the Pakatan coalition with PAS Baru can win the next elections._____

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