

PAS may be caught in a trap of its own making

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COMMENT PAS went unilateral last year by insisting on going ahead with its plan to implement hudud in Kelantan.

This plan was never in the common policy framework to which PAS and its past allies, DAP and PKR, in the now defunct Pakatan Rakyat, signed on to going into the 13th general elections held in May 2013.

But last year's insistence on hudud was not the only case of PAS breaking the consensus that held the now-expired opposition coalition together.

In April 2013, a month before the general election, top leaders of PAS met with de facto PKR head and Pakatan prime minister-designate, Anwar Ibrahim, to tell him that in the event Pakatan won the general election, PAS would nominate Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, the Umno MP for Gua Musang, as their candidate to become PM.

This was an astonishing departure from the then-publicised Pakatan consensus that Anwar would be PM if Pakatan bested BN at the polls.

The news of this unilateralism by PAS only emerged in mid-2014 when the then-director of strategy of PKR, Rafizi Ramli, disclosed it in the general hubbub among Pakatan component parties over the issue of why Khalid Ibrahim should be replaced as menteri besar of Selangor and, if so, who ought to replace him.

The intended PAS unilateralism about the nominee for PM did not materialise because Pakatan, although it won the popular vote, did not gain a parliamentary plurality at Election 2013.

Pakatan amputated by hudud

PAS' next attempt at unilateral conduct came in March 2014 when its Kelantan chapter went ahead and obtained state assembly backing for amendments to laws passed in 1993 that were aimed at paving the way for the tabling of a Private Member's Bill in Parliament, which if passed, would enable - in the PAS view - the enforcement of the Islamic penal code in Kelantan.

The move to have hudud, unremittingly opposed by the DAP, led to the break-up of the seven-year Pakatan alliance.

In June this year, PAS cut ties to the DAP, which should have logically led to the termination of its collaboration with the Chinese-majority secular party in the Selangor and Penang state governments run by the opposition.

But PAS chose to rely on sophistry rather than logic in arguing that it was the DAP which ought to leave Pakatan, not PAS.

In this, it had the tacit support of PKR which equivocated on its stance on hudud and pretended that PAS' decision to cut ties with DAP held no great import for the unity of the opposition coalitions that rule Penang and Selangor.

Welter of confusion

PAS remained confident that the support it had given to the PKR menteri besar in Selangor, Azmin Ali, would see it through the welter of confusion that its decision to cut ties into the DAP had thrust the coalition.

Azmin duly confirmed the PAS optimism that its unilateralism on hudud and on severing ties to the DAP would see the Islamic party safely through a stormy stretch.

The Selangor menteri besar became a vocal exponent on the need to keep PAS within whatever remained of the opposition alliance.

He maintained that stance even as the comprehensive defeat of the progressives by the conservatives at PAS' elective muktamar in June led inevitably to the progressives setting up shop on their own.

Meanwhile, PKR went on to make an electoral pact with PAS that both parties would avoid contesting each other in the next general election three years down the road (GE14).

This undertaking by PAS to avoid three-cornered fights must have fortified the Islamic party's feeling of impunity over its unilateralist conduct.

PKR pact undermining Amanah?

Now, some of the progressives who left PAS have decided to join PKR instead of Parti Amanah Negara, their new vehicle which is scheduled to be launched on Sept 16.

One, the MP for Tumpat (in Kelantan), Kamaruddin Jaafar, by dint of his joining PKR on Friday would test the PAS undertaking that it would not have three-cornered fights with PKR at GE14.

Should PKR field Kamaruddin in Tumpat, would PAS refrain from claiming the seat as theirs under the terms of the electoral understanding achieved with PKR last month?

Hatta Ramli, MP for Kuala Krai (in Kelantan), is another prospective member of Amanah who theoretically, now that Kamaruddin has joined PKR from PAS, could make the same move, which would leave PAS in a similar dilemma with respect to the seat held by Hatta.

Talk about having your cake and eating it, too - well, PAS has done it with considerable impunity before.

It would be hard put to do so one too many times; its rectitude would suffer.

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