

Four reasons why we need Pakatan Harapan

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MP SPEAKS I am making public my speech at the recent Opposition Leader's Roundtable that precipitated the formation of Pakatan Harapan in the hope to enrich our public debate with more perspectives. I told the roundtable that I would contest four oft-repeated clichés.

Firstly, is the new coalition being formed hastily?

Pakatan Rakyat ceased to exist in June 2015 although it had been dysfunctional for quite a while, at least since the Selangor Menteri Besar crisis, if not earlier.

There is a need to have a pact sooner rather than later because the Opposition must be prepared for the possibility of Umno deposing Prime Minister Najib Razak and replacing him with Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (photo) or even Muhyiddin Yassin.

There is a huge leadership vacuum in Malaysian politics and the sooner the vacuum is filled the better it is for the Malaysian public who aspire to see the Opposition as counterweight to the Umno-led Government.

Second, can the Opposition win the next election by default?

I understand that some opine that the Opposition just has to stay under one roof patiently while the Najib government self-destructs. There is no need for us to do more than just to contest one-to-one in the next election and victories would fall on our laps.

There was this argument that "the Opposition never wins election, it is the Government that loses it." Such view is both complacent and fatalistic.

To attempt to win by default will only give rise to the fear of a freak election that may push the voters back to Umno when push comes to shove. The Opposition has to build public support and confidence for a change of government.

Third, how to win power without PAS?

There is also a cliché that PAS held sway among Malay voters, especially the rural ones, therefore it is impractical not to include PAS in the new coalition.

Yet, one must not forget that without the progressive faction, PAS would have no capacity to speak to urban Malay voters, not to mention non-Malay voters.

Assuming that the political "wind" is in favour of the Opposition, the next election will be determined by whether the Opposition can defeat Umno in about 35 to 40 marginal seats in the peninsula.

Umno has 73 seats in the peninsula. Losing the said 40 marginal seats would spell the end of Umno as government. Those marginals are mostly semi-urban seats in the West Coast of the peninsula and mixed in ethnic composition.

These are seats that the current Hadi-led PAS - without the progressive faction – would find it very hard to win.

Of course, Umno can try to repeat its feat in the 2013 general election by instilling the fear of Chinese in the minds of the Malay voters in the semi-urban marginals. But what worked in 2013 may not necessarily work in the next general election.

More importantly, the new Opposition coalition has to convince the Malay voters in the semi-urban areas that a new government would be a better one compared to Umno, and to be better is not to play the race card but to build trust and solidarity among Malaysians of all ethnic backgrounds for a new future.

If the new Opposition can build trust and solidarity especially among Malay youths in the semi urban areas, there may be an anti-establishment wave or even a tsunami that will sweep Umno away for good.

The next gelombang (wave) would be essentially economic. One can see from the 'Red Shirt' movement that it is inciting hatred out of the perceived economic inequality between Malays and Chinese. Their voice may sound racist, yet their tone was unequivocally economic.

The new Opposition coalition must convince Malaysians that it is Umno's cronyism that deprives Malay youth of decent jobs and adequate pay, and it was never about the Chinese, DAP or any other bogeyman.

For instance, the 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers that are to be brought in into Malaysia, according to Home Minister Ahmad Zahid, over a three-year period from 2016 will certainly result in a 'race to the bottom' in terms of wages for Malay workers. Umno cronies will benefit but young Malays will suffer.

Moreover, it has nothing much to do with PAS, too. There is a lot of work cut out for the new coalition but PAS, under the current conservative leadership, is not interested to be part of this new movement.

Fourth, can PKR play the role of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah of 1990?

There is a misguided belief among some friends and Opposition supporters that PKR can play the role of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (photo) in heading two different coalitions at the same time. In 1990, Ku Li's Semangat 46 was in alliance with PAS via Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah and with DAP via Gagasan Rakyat.

At that time, both DAP and PAS were confined to their conventional grounds, had no overlapping claims to electoral constituencies.

However, the case of 2015 is entirely different. PAS and Amanah will be having overlapping claims to electoral seats. In essence, PAS is aware of the reality that Amanah is growing at its expense at rapid speed, which PAS would not allow, and vice versa. Either party would not allow PKR to provide space for the other party.

In conclusion, Malaysia is in dire need of an Opposition coalition to fill the leadership void and to chart the future with coherent policies, and with political messages that unite rather than divide.

It is time for clarity. It is time to move on and shape a new future for Malaysia.

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