

What's wrong and right about Rafizi's GE14 strategy

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COMMENT Events at the Umno AGM have over-shadowed some recent insights into opposition thinking on strategy for GE14; among those, philanthropist and political observer [Koon Yew Yin](#) and DAP supremo [Lim Kit Siang](#).

The most interesting, however, was the [interview](#) given by PKR secretary-general Rafizi Ramli. Obviously if PAS enters into an electoral pact or coalition with Umno, the opposition's strategy is straightforward: Pakatan Harapan versus PAS/Umno/BN. The dilemma occurs if PAS declares that it is an opposition party opposed to Umno/BN.

In an independent poll carried out on Dec 4 - presumably commissioned by PKR - Rafizi said "at least 30 percent of Malay respondents have made up their minds to reject Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and Umno, but have yet to decide which opposition parties they will support".

He added: "Some are not even aware of the existence of the three-month-old PAS splinter party Amanah," further noting that "the natural opposition to Umno has always been PAS. If they (the Malay voters) reject Umno, they will fall back to PAS".

On the basis of this poll, surely Rafizi is right when he warns: "If PKR were to sever its ties with the Islamic party, then it would end any possibility of coordinating among the opposition to arrive at a straight fight against BN, which is necessary to win in the next election."

Rafizi reiterated PKR's stand that Pakatan Harapan is a coalition while their relationship with PAS is an electoral pact. "At the end of the day, what governs the next government is what we agree upon in Pakatan Harapan and PAS is not a part of it," he said.

In attempting to reassure the urban non-Muslim population about the electoral pact with PAS, Rafizi wants us to believe that PAS has no political agenda of its own, and is stupid enough to be used by PKR to prevent three-cornered fights and yet have no say in the next government in the event of an opposition victory. Come on Rafizi, stop dreaming! Nobody believes this fantasy - as shown by the comments of *Malaysiakini* readers.

Hopefully, Rafizi and PKR are taking time to read these comments, but in case they do not, here are a couple of quotes: "What will happen if the opposition including PAS were to win Putrajaya; will the bickering inevitably start and they fall apart? Then the Malaysians will never trust (repeat) Pakatan again."

"All PKR cares is capturing Putrajaya at all cost, never mind the political principles, credibility and morality. Why is it so desperate that it must have an electoral pact with PAS that not only does not subscribe to the Pakatan Harapan platform but is inclined towards joining Umno, its arch enemy?"

PKR's strategy of having a broad political grouping of PKR, PAS, Amanah, and DAP can only succeed if the strategy complies with the following three political realities:

1. Good governance versus the politics of race and religion

There are two great issues in Malaysian politics which needs to be decided on by the Malaysian electorate. First, the issue of good governance: does the country want to re-elect a government widely perceived to be corrupt, embroiled in numerous scandals, dictatorial, against the checks and balances of a two-party system, and concentrates enormous power in the hands of one man, the prime minister?

Second, the politics of identity (another name for the politics of race and religion): who we are, how do we treat people different from ourselves, the position and role of Islam, the relationship of Islamic to secular law.

But the Malaysian electorate needs to decide on these two issues separately, one after another, at two separate elections. It will be a great blunder if the leaders of the opposition believe that these two issues can be decided on in one election.

It will lead to voters who are anti-corruption and anti-hudud voting for a pro-corruption and anti-hudud candidate as the lesser evil to an anti-corruption but pro-hudud candidate. Similarly, an anti-corruption but pro-hudud voter may vote a pro-corruption and pro-hudud candidate as the lesser evil.

2. A grouping involving PAS, DAP and Amanah is inherently unstable

It is right that PKR should take on the mediator role, but nobody will be able to believe that the PKR, PAS, DAP and Amanah grouping can stay together for five years and function as a normal government. Their political agendas are too different and the personal relations between their leaders, poor.

However, it is believable that such a grouping can stay together for a limited time, say one year, to perform a well-defined agreed task, such as restoring good governance to the administration.

3. An opportunistic alliance to topple the BN government may not attract support

The programme to be implemented must therefore be spelt out clearly and in detail, and shown to benefit the people.

Furthermore, only if PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang himself publicly and explicitly signs up to such a programme, will people have confidence that the party will not stab its partners in the back.

Like Koon and Rafizi, I believe that it is important, if not essential, to have a broad-based unified opposition to ensure that only two-way fights take place during the next election.

However, since such a unified opposition can be expected to stay together only for a limited time, the unified opposition should announce that, if elected, it will exercise power for only one year to implement an agreed limited programme to restore good governance to government, return proper democracy to the people, and address urgent needs.

Such a programme will repeal the National Security Council Act, Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (Sosma), and Sedition Act; abolish GST; nationalise or otherwise prevent toll companies from raising road tolls so steeply year after year; undertake an investigation of 1MDB which is free from political interference; correct the widespread perception that the judiciary, attorney-general, Election Commission, and police serve and protect the ruling party's interests and not the country's interests.

Having cleaned up the political system, there will be a level playing field in GE15 for DAP to fight PAS over hudud, Amanah to fight PAS over their different visions of Islam, and etc.

Najib has warned Umno deputy president Muhyiddin Yassin that the quarrel between them is no longer a personal matter. If Muhyiddin continues merely to criticise Najib over 1MDB without laying out his vision and plan to return Umno to its original mission of serving the Malay community and the nation - instead of being a money machine for the top leadership - then his actions will be seen as the personal reaction of a disappointed man, and he will lose.

Without using names, Muhyiddin has likened Najib to a cancer destroying Umno. But following the Umno AGM, it should be clear to Muhyiddin that this cancer can only be removed from Umno if Najib loses GE14. So this presents Muhyiddin with an interesting dilemma for GE14:

- Does he work for an Umno victory which further strengthens Najib and causes more destruction to Umno?

- Does he do nothing and hopes the opposition beats Najib so that he can win the 2018 Umno presidency election? But this is the action of a weak leader and he will also be blamed for doing nothing.
- Does he have the courage of his convictions and work with the opposition to defeat Najib so that the cancer is removed and damage to Umno stopped?

Put another way, is Muhyiddin Hang Tuah or Hang Jebat? This depends on who is the sultan. If the sultan is Umno president Najib, then Hang Tuah would defend Najib against the opposition and Hang Jebat would work with the opposition to defeat Najib because he, according to Muhyiddin, has been unjust.

But if the sultan is Umno, then both Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat would work with the opposition to defeat Najib, who - as the cancer - is causing damage to Umno, the sultan.

For this strategy of defeating Najib at GE14 to work, this question has to be asked and answered: will defeat for Umno under Najib's leadership at GE14 mean the destruction of Umno? If we look at experience in other democratic countries, the answer is definitely no.

Usually a political party, after 10-15 years in power, becomes tired, lazy, arrogant and runs out of ideas. Defeat forces the party to search out and correct its own weaknesses and think out new ways of solving the country's problems. After such a long period in power, defeat would be good for Umno. It would reform, renew and re-invigorate the party.

In my view, it is impossible to destroy Umno as it is an integral part of the history, culture and social life of the Malay community. Those who want a two-party system also do not want to destroy Umno. We just want a reformed and honest Umno to act as a check-and-balance against Pakatan Harapan if they gain power

If Muhyiddin fights Najib from within a limited time, limited programme opposition pact, Umno members will feel even more reassured. Whoever wins, Umno will be part of the government, the difference being whether it is Muhyiddin's or Najib's version.

Because the programme to be implemented is limited and agreed beforehand, Muhyiddin and other Umno dissidents would not be required to agree to any programme which is against Umno's ideology. Because it is time limited, Muhyiddin and other Umno dissidents could return to Umno as saviours if Najib is defeated.

Although for those who have Umno "in their blood", it is unthinkable to collaborate with opposition parties, it nevertheless may be necessary if the space for democratic change within the party is denied.

A limited time, limited programme opposition pact is possible, credible and can produce a winning combination of Umno dissidents, PAS, PKR, DAP, and Amanah.

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