

What does it take to be PKR No 2?
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COMMENT In the media hoopla over the Selangor PKR crisis, revolving as it did on the Khalid Ibrahim and Azmin Ali rivalry as prelude to a contest for the party deputy president's post, little or no attention was paid to a vital question.

This is what is required of one to be No 2 in a PKR that is supposed to lead the Pakatan Rakyat coalition.

At this point, some may smirk at the entire notion of PKR being the leading party in Pakatan, what with five MPs and several lesser lights having left the party in the last one-a-half years of tumult in its ranks.

Although their departures have sullied PKR's stature, few seriously feel that the quitters were anything other than fringe players in the overall composition of the party.

PKR can replace them with, in all likelihood, better quality candidates who can win back the very constituencies held by these defectors.

But can PKR find a leader with the intellectual and moral stature to be No 2 to Anwar Ibrahim and help him hold the Pakatan coalition together, which means striking a balance between an avowedly secular DAP and a theocracy-favouring PAS?

anwar pc in hong kong 130208If you think light of this matter, consider the anxious musings of DAP chairman Karpal Singh on the possibility that once Pakatan takes federal power, there could well be a renewal of the question of an Islamic state which Karpal concedes is a matter of ideological principle to PAS.

While acknowledging that PAS would find it difficult to abandon its Islamic state agenda, Karpal reiterated that DAP would never give up its stance that Malaysia is a secular state.

Karpal, who once called for Anwar's replacement as Pakatan supremo, now acknowledges that Anwar is the main adhesive in a coalition of disparate ideologies.

He is the only politician who can keep the improbable Pakatan coalition together. And keeping it together is the only way to propelling it to replace the status quo that is beyond redemption.

Islam compatible with democracy?

Two reasons explain the phenomenon of Anwar Ibrahim: One is that Anwar has been able to project his struggles against his Umno-imposed travails into a mirror of the larger citizenry's need for a better Malaysia.

And secondly, Anwar has displayed surpassing intellection in his quest to build a religiously informed public philosophy for the Malaysian experiment in democratic restoration.

Just now this quest is connected to a world-historical issue, which is whether Islam is compatible with democracy in Muslim-majority nations.

Much of his career till now and to come – should be become prime minister of Malaysia – is joined to this issue.

Is this overstating the case?

Surveying national, regional and the world scenarios, one thinks not.

We are at a world-historical crossroads where the truths bequeath to us by religion, Greek rationality, Roman law and the European Enlightenment are knowable through the arts of reason.

These truths confer on us certain obligations, both personal and civil, that have to be held, assented to, and worked into the fabric of democratic institutions for the prevalence of peace, justice, freedom and unity.

The saga of Anwar's tumultuous career and intellection contain constant reminders of the need to make the ongoing Malaysian experiment in democratic restoration a success.

Seen and defined in this way, the question of who is to be No 2 in PKR dwarfs the presumptive candidates. They ought to be in no hurry to fill it.

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