

Pakatan not favoured by Singapore
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COMMENT If diplomacy entails the art of conveying to a party one's candid assessment of a third, that exercise would be fraught in the age of the WikiLeaks exposure.

For if what the philosopher Pascal held - "I lay it down as a fact that if all men knew what others say of them, there would not be four friends in the world" - is true, there would have to be rock-solid assurances of confidentiality before there can be candor in future diplomatic tete-a-tetes, especially between Asian envoys and their US counterparts.

No diplomat is going to feel free holding forth in private if he or she knows that the world would be listening in, eventually.

WikiLeaks has well-nigh ruined diplomatic conversation as a source of insight on what's moving and shaking in the world.

The dim view of some Malaysian leaders held by assorted Singapore diplomats, as disclosed in leaked diplomatic cables, is no more or no less than that spouted by Malaysian oppositionists of the same leaders.

For the Malaysian opposition to be riled up over this would be hypocritical. Worse, it would lend retrospective credence to the accusations of disloyalty leveled by government leaders at opposition figures who have criticised the country's leadership in foreign forums.

Kuan Yew's scouting mission

As for the opinion of Singapore intelligence on Sodomy II - that Anwar walked into a "sex trap" and indeed did what he is indicted for doing - it has to be sieved for the predisposition of the party making that conclusion.

lee kuan yewIt's not such an arbitrary leap to conclude that Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew would not like to see Pakatan Rakyat come to power in Malaysia: it's a development that would augur ill for the longevity of PAP rule in Singapore.

Recall the visit he made to Malaysia in August 2000 and the comments he aired during the trip.

Ostensibly, the purpose of that visit was to view the "sea of change" that had taken place in Malaysia under Dr Mahathir Mohamad's rule.

While professing himself to be impressed by the huge infrastructural makeover he saw, Lee took time to ask after a matter that must have been the real motive behind the reconnoitering mission: to assess what the chances were for Sungai Buloh prison's then most famous inmate (Anwar Ibrahim) to come back into the limelight of Malaysian politics.

(Anwar was then serving time on what is now widely viewed as trumped-up corruption and sodomy charges. He was released in August 2004.)

Lee was told that if the political situation (read corruption, cronyism and nepotism)

deteriorated, the chances of an Anwar comeback were good.

From remarks he during that 2000 visit, it appeared that Lee has a proprietary interest in the matter.

He alluded to the 'black eye' incident - of Anwar being beaten up by the former police chief Rahim Noor - and offered the view that it cost Umno "20 seats" in the elections of November 1999. (PAS won 27 seats, up from seven in the 1995 poll, to top the opposition tally).

Need for a strong opposition

Those remarks, particularly the one about the electoral consequences of the 'black eye' incident, shunted Lee from fastening his attention to what should really have captured it: that the Malaysian electorate were willing, at long last, to countenance the idea that the country needed to have a strong opposition.

Otherwise, "we (meaning the ruling government) would run amok", as former prime minister Hussein Onn once candidly reflected to former Lord President Suffian Hashim.

reformasi 1998 270808 02That reality - the need for a strong opposition - was beginning to dawn on the Malaysian landscape by the end of the 1990s.

No doubt, the travails of Anwar in the late 1990s were crucial to the coalescence of that idea among Malaysian voters.

But it was not the sole coagulant. The push for political reform preceded his emergence in Malaysian politics in 1981 when, as Abim leader, he led the opposition to repressive amendments to the Societies Act in 1981.

Now that push for reform has metamorphosed into a discernible determination to replace a seemingly irredeemable ruling coterie with an opposition coalition that is credible, even if ideologically incoherent.

These developments are plentifully troubling to Singapore's Lee and his take on Sodomy II should be vetted for its inherent bias against the person whose trajectory has helped shake his complacent preconceptions.

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