

They PASs the offer
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In the end, it had to come to what had been expected. PAS demonstrated itself as a principled party - in a field where principles are few - when it rejected all forms of co-operation with Umno or even a coalition government.

MCPX

nik aziz hugging hadi awang b 230708But that does not spell the end of the ongoing muzakarah (dialogue) between Umno and the Islamists.

PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang (pic, face away hugging nik aziz) has reiterated his party's commitment to the Pakatan Rakyat and reformation of the government and issued an open call for defections from the ruling coalition at the Federal level. Many analysts had in fact predicted that the so-called Umno-PAS Malay unity talks were a non-starter for various reasons and would fizzle out sooner, rather than later, despite all the hype generated in the pro-government mainstream Malay media which, in the words of fallen angel Anwar Ibrahim, has gone to town with the worst kind of racist reporting it could muster for decades.

Hadi however, in an interesting caveat, reiterated his party's commitment to the muzakarah with Umno, but only on issues of national interest, not coalition government, and offered similar talks as well with any other interested party. Effectively, that squashes the suspicion that the two main Malay political parties in the country have a racist agenda up their sleeves, as in the days following the searing Sino-Malay race riots of Fri 13 May 1969.

It remains to be seen whether Umno would continue the muzakarah with PAS especially when all the initiatives are with the latter. Umno's political options are increasingly limited in an ever narrowing field and its days even numbered unless the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition can rebrand itself in time for the next General Election in 2012/13 or even before.

What is the ism that will drive Umno and the BN forward after 50 years at the helm? The Opposition Alliance have Parti Keadilan's ketuanan rakyat (supremacy of the people); DAP's Malaysian Malaysia, PAS reiterating that Islam does not allow for racism in any form and Hindraf (Hindu Rights Action Force) calling for equal rights in a stirring call for makkal sakthi, people power.

All Umno has done so far is to reiterate ketuanan Melayu (Malay supremacy), which many have dismissed as ketuanan Umnoputra in disguise, and maintain the continued fiction of a Social Contract between Malay (to rule) and non-Malay (to be ruled).

khir toyo interview 280408 02The muzakarah had been initiated at the invitation of Umno after the failure of the party to interest PAS in a coalition government in Selangor after the the General Elections which saw the Opposition Alliance take power in four of the richest states in Malaysia – Selangor, Perak, Penang and Kedah, all contiguous territory – and an almost clean sweep of the Parliament seats in Kuala Lumpur. In addition, PAS retained its spiritual and political stronghold in Kelantan. We learn from former Selangor menteri besar Khir Toyo (pic), now a blog writer spewing racial venom at every opportunity to force a circling of the wagons among the Malay community, that the muzakarah was a follow-up to the failed bid for Selangor.

Perak then

Despite having been thwarted in Selangor, Umno made a bold bid for Perak during the muzakarah itself when former Menteri Besar Tajol Rosli initially raised the prospect of a PAS-Umno coalition government, and later when there was a deafening silence, even toyed with the possibility of including the coalition partners of PAS.

"It is almost as if Umno wants to defect to the Opposition Alliance with no thought for its allies in the Barisan Nasional, even those in Malaysian Borneo who helped it form the Federal Government," said a senior political analyst in Kuala Lumpur. Tajol Rosli is the man, voters remember who locked himself in his palatial residence post elections and cried himself non-stop like a child for half a day, unable to bear the pain of defeat in Perak.

There has been much unease over the muzakarah which began and continued in secret until exposed by the alternative media. DAP stalwart Karpal Singh, for one, denounced the talks in no uncertain terms and called for a review of PAS's role in Pakatan despite the devastating effects that this would have on the Opposition Alliance.

Also, he made unflattering comments on the role of Islam in government and reiterated his famous "over my dead body" pledge from many years ago on the possibility of turning Malaysia into a theocracy. The mainstream media, controlled by the government and political parties in government, were quick to seize on the Karpal comments and portray them as the beginning of cracks within the Opposition Alliance.

Their living on hope and wishful thinking reporting have however been put to an end by Hadi's announcement on the muzakarah so far and its future direction, if any.

islam malaysia muslim men in prayer makmum 070207Within PAS itself, there were any number of detractors. Kelantan Menteri Besar Nik Aziz, for one, may be an aging politician living in the extreme past of men on camels and horses waving swords through the deserts of faraway lands but he certainly called Umno's bluff in initiating the muzakarah with his statement on Hudud and Qisas.

Bername cites Hudud as referring to a class of punishments which are fixed for certain crimes, including theft, robbery, illicit sex, alcohol consumption and apostasy, where the punishment for these offences are corporal - read amputation of the limbs, stoning to death etc - in nature.

Qisas (law of retaliation) refers to offences that involve bodily injury or loss of life, the punishment for which is death or imprisonment. Compensation in the form of money or property is accepted if the guardian of the victim forgives the offender.

The hudud pledge

Nik Aziz had obviously taken the right political approach by asking Umno to demonstrate its "sincerity" on Malay political unity by placing the acceptance of Hudud and Qisas as pre-conditions for a merger of the two parties.

In Islam as interpreted by PAS no Muslim can object to Hudud and Qisas. This may be a matter of debate with no end in sight given the deep divisions that dominate the Muslim faithful all over the world. The PAS spiritual leader's stand has opened up a deep divide between the two parties and places pro-Umno PAS leaders like deputy president Nasharuddin

in a quandary. Suddenly, the ground has been cut from underneath his feet and he will henceforth find the muzakarah tough going at best and a dead end at worst.

Nik Aziz's opposition to the muzakarah is well-known as he has been reported as saying that he "smells a rat" in Umno's initiation of the muzakarah. Once bitten, twice shy, Nik Aziz had added, in reference to the 1970's when Umno wooed PAS to join the ruling Barisan Nasional and worked behind the scenes to wrest Kelantan away from the party.

The rest is history. Four years later PAS pulled out from the BN and went on to lose Kelantan and it was many Islamic moons before they could re-build their strength and re-capture the state which is their political and spiritual stronghold.

may 13 riots 041004 police gauntlets Patently, there are parallels between the present muzakarah and the 1970s. Nearly thirty years earlier, it was also after a battering the BN, then known as the Alliance, received at the hands of the Opposition at the Tues 10 May 1969 General Elections which culminated in May 13 and half-completed polling in Borneo abandoned. Parliament being shuttered, democracy suspended, a state of emergency imposed and the country run by the totalitarian National Operations Council.

Then, as now, Umno appealed for Malay unity and cajoled PAS into a marriage of convenience. A share in the spoils of the New Economic Policy (1970-90), then just announced, was an additional carrot besides the stick i.e. the continued suspension of democratic institutions.

This time around, what could Umno possibly offer PAS when there are already deep misgivings among the BN component parties themselves towards Umno - unlike in 1970 when there was much camaraderie.

Besides, PAS Menteri Besars already run the Governments in Perak, Kedah and Kelantan. The additional carrots that Umno can offer can only be at the Federal level and at the expense of its BN component allies who are already unhappy, especially in Malaysian Borneo, over their current stake in the Federal Government. Indeed, at this juncture, the fate of the Sabah People's Progressive Party in the BN hangs in the balance after it openly expressed no confidence in the leadership of embattled Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi.

Many see PAS demand for Umno's agreement on Hudud and Qisas a contradiction in terms when there are no similar demands on its allies in the Pakatan, Parti Keadilan Rakyat of Anwar Ibrahim, DAP and the outlawed Hindraf activists parking themselves under the umbrella of the latter two parties. Others see no contradiction and say that PAS is only being practical under the circumstances.

pas for all campaign launch 110907 talk "PAS is no longer the party that it once was, scaring away non-Muslim voters with visions of barbaric punishments for crimes under the banner of an Islam only they know," say political observers who see a bright future for the Islamic party which is known for fiery oratory bordering in a kind of medieval entertainment for the rural masses, increasingly disenchanted with Umno's so-called Malay agenda.

"I hope Umno agrees to Hudud and Qisas so that we will know once and for all how united are the Muslims and Malays on these questions when they find their arms being chopped off," says a high-ranking DAP leader in Kota Kinabalu sardonically, pointing out that Malaysia is a secular state.

Examples abound in the street on what may happen in the kind of theocracy envisioned by PAS:

(i) If politicians are found stealing through the back door from the Treasury or taking bank loans which they refuse to pay back (also a form of stealing), shouldn't they have their arms chopped off?;

(ii) And what about the thousands of illegals who have got on the electoral rolls after theft of the Malaysian identity?; and

(iii) Hudud and Qisas would be a good way of dealing with the total corruption of the Malaysian system. Perversion of the nation under former prime minister Mahathir, it is said, is an understatement.

The Mahathir hand

Much of the venom among Hudud and Qisas believers in PAS is reserved for Mahathir who is credited in their words with "single-handedly ushering in the total corruption of the system", during his long 22 year rule.

Beginning with the electoral rolls (illegal immigrants becoming citizens through the back door and getting on the electoral rolls), re-designating the majority of 500,000 Indian Muslims as Malays to bolster ethnic Malay seats and "stealing" indirectly from the Treasury through variation clauses and awarding projects in compensation for political party financing activities.

Continuing with Banking (writing off loans to family and cronies under the guise of bank mergers), Education (filling the teaching profession with only one community, discriminatory marking systems for government exams and extending the quota system to even critical disciplines like medicine, law and engineering, among others), emasculation of the Judiciary, the criminalisation of the Police and the Civil Service and in general branches of the government acting as if they were branches of the ruling political party.

"Many civil servants are in fact busy making money these days after having commercialised their positions and prostituting themselves to all and sundry," admits an union leader with the government in commenting on the recent arrest of the Immigration Department director-general and his deputy and several of their officers on corruption charges stemming from their turning the illegal migrant traffic into Malaysia into their own private business.

hindraf klang court sedition 261107 supporterThe system bequeathed by Mahathir had an Achilles heel. What the Machiavellian politician didn't bank on was that Indian voters, the majority scattered across 67 Parliamentary seats, would finally get their act together and act as a catalyst for the political tsunami. "That's a big loophole that Mahathir left unplugged because he naively believed that the Indian voters would continue to have a slave mentality and accept the Malaysian caste system foisted on the nation by his Umnoputras," says a Malaysian Indian Congress leader aligned to former party deputy president Subramaniam.

In any case, the repercussions of Hudud and Qisas even if meant for cleaning up the Malaysian system would be far-reaching, leading to the breakaway of overwhelmingly non-Muslim majority Malaysian Borneo and even the splintering of what is left of the Federation along the political fault lines between the cosmopolitan west coast of the peninsula and the east coast deep in Malay country.

Alternatively, as pointed out by political observers and analysts, the continuation of the Umno-PAS muzakarah may in fact bring the defection of Umno under Badawi to the Opposition

Alliance and make Anwar Ibrahim's call for a change in government a self-fulfilling prophecy in a way even he has not envisaged.

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