

Malaysian politics is the art of the possible
Malaysiakini.com
Aug 14, 2008
K Sugumaran

The Umno-PAS talks of a joint rule in Selangor have finally subsided after rubbing nerves raw for a few weeks. At this stage, it appears that the winner is Pakatan Rakyat (PR) for having come through another crisis. PAS, however, has been left to sooth troubled souls within the party.

MCPX

On the Barisan Nasional side, Umno's partners were struck with anxiety but could do precious little after their drubbing on March 8. When Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi leaked the news of the secret meeting, it was like pouring water on a hot frying pan, judging from the reactions of the Opposition.

While Anwar Ibrahim took it in his stride, PR members like DAP and Parti Keadilan Rakyat appeared shaken and wanted to know the whys and the whens of the whole matter. An equally shaken MCA had already been toying with the idea of opening up the party to other races and wanted clarification from Umno.

There was also talk of dissolving the BN and forming one multi-racial party. At the moment, this looks like a far fetched idea because of the immense complexities involved in such an exercise involving egos, party cultures and hierarchies.

PAS spiritual adviser Nik Aziz Nik Mat initially rejected the idea of such a move, but later suggested a merger of PAS and Umno, but on the Islamic party's terms which effectively scuttled the idea. However, both sides agreed that they would continue to discuss Islamic and Malay issues, as and when the needs arise.

Meanwhile, as political temperatures were rising, former Selangor Menteri Besar, now opposition leader, Mohd Khir Toyo jumped in, claiming credit for bringing Umno and PAS together. Unwittingly, he revealed his dependence on emotional buttons when confronted by a novel political situation.

It's obvious he approached PAS as nothing more than a supplicant. Otherwise how could Umno offer the menteri besar and the deputy MB's posts to the former?

To reinforce his credentials, Khir joined the rest of the gang in sticking needles into the government's voodoo doll named Anwar Ibrahim. Khir accused the former deputy prime minister of spoiling his attempt to broker new ties between the two parties for the sake of Malay unity by using his influence over the opposition party.

This is one begs the question: What's wrong with Anwar attempting to ruin Umno's attempts to get back into the saddle in Selangor? Didn't Khir launch an attempt to torpedo PR? Then, he bleats when it turns out to be a dud. All's fair in love, war and politics, right?

All's fair in politics

Also, I had to really struggle to stem the tide of tears threatening to spill from my eyes when I heard of Khir's spirit of self- sacrifice in offering to forgo any part in the new coalition

government.

That came shortly after the elections when he arranged a meeting between Umno President and Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi with PAS President Abdul Hadi Awang, his deputy Nashrudin Mat Isa and Terengganu PAS commissioner Mustafa Ali.

"Unfortunately the influence of Anwar in PAS through the party's secretary-general Kamaruddin Jaafar blocked the initiative," Khir wrote in his blog.

Oh, Anwar, how could you? Look what you've done to such a rare and noble soul like Khir!

"As long as Anwar is important in Pakatan Rakyat, the muzakarah (dialogue) will not succeed. Anwar does not want to see Malays unite and that is why he formed Pakatan that thrives on the ideals of equality to the extent of elevating other religions on the same par as the primary religion in this country, Islam," he added.

Quite amazing really. Here's a man swept out of his top state government seat by virtue of a multi-racial vote, accusing his opponent of being against Malay unity. Khir said this was proven by the fact that Anwar was being supported by 'extremist' Chinese and Indians via DAP and the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf).

It would be a miracle of sorts if there was any one race in the world which is truly united.

It's matter of record that a good number of Selangor Malays were united in wanting the BN out. So would Khir tar those voters who favoured PR as supporters of extremists too?

It looks like Khir has hoisted himself on his own petard. Well, perhaps the proper term should be broomstick. Not gift-wrapped, naturally.

Also, Khir must not deny his role in the dramatic turn of events where Umno hemorrhaged Malay support. That, too, in a state described by Umno vice-president and International Trade and Industry Minister Muhyiddin Yassin as a 'goldmine'.

PR, our last hope?

One of the most successful people who toiled in this mine must be the late state assemblyman of Port Klang, Zakaria Derus. His illegal palatial mansion dramatically set among low cost terrace houses in Klang is turning out to be a monument to BN rule when Khir was at the state's helm.

But now that the Anti-Corruption Agency has been allowed to kick into high gear, it is providing a fascinating as well as frightening insight into the Malaysia Incorporated concept which appears to have been taken to heart as well as the pockets of those at high levels.

Apparently unaware, Khir in his blog also practically confessed that his political skills were no match for Anwar's, playing a rather obvious hand to stir up more trouble for the former deputy prime minister. That Khir's out of touch with current realities on the ground is obvious. A plugged in world has ended the era of engineering consensus through manipulation of information.

The dance of the unlikely couple that is PAS and Umno has thrown up a whole new series of stresses and strains testing both sides of the divide, while behind the scenes, someone is

hiding a smile at how things have worked out.

For the whole episode had turned the spotlight on those who would now be regretting they ever ventured into this gamble. Their desperation to score with their respective constituencies was exposed, their credibility plunging even lower.

In Penang, there's an old saying which goes: "Pi mai, pi mai, tang tu juga" (No matter where you go, you end up where you began). But this time, there's a variation waiting to be played out. The new phase of the country's politics should start in late December or early next year. I'll take a gamble and write my piece on hesitant futurology next time.

Here's a passing thought. Umno founder Onn Jafaar's spirit would be wearing a smile at the turn of events in the country he helped to prise from British hands. Who knows, he might be just as well be looking favourably upon PR, which in all likelihood might turn the vision he had so long ago, into reality.

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