

Permatang Pauh : will history be made?
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Kim Quek

How will future historians fifty or a hundred years from now look at Permatang Pauh in relation to Malaysia? Will it be like Gettysburg to US, or Yenan to the new China – famous names that evoke memories of major turning points in the history of nations?
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The answer depends on how the people in Permatang Pauh will vote in the by-election tomorrow. Not whether Anwar Ibrahim will be returned as a member of parliament, but whether the electorate will give Anwar a decisive margin of victory that can be taken as an endorsement of his plan to take over power from the crumbling and decadent Barisan Nasional (BN).

anwar ibrahim ceramah in tok kandu permatang pauh by election 220808 01If Anwar wins by a convincing majority – despite BN waging the dirtiest of election campaigns in memory against him – then he will be well-poised to formalise the cross-over of disenchanting BN MPs who share the aspirations of Pakatan Rakyat and are now waiting for such a moment to make the switch.

With BN already in an advanced stage of disintegration and decadence amid a fast-sinking economy, public fury and distrust, the anticipated cross-over, once triggered, will turn into a torrent that will sweep Pakatan into power.

Since the March 8 elections, BN, which is a grouping of 14 racial parties, has already lost its traction as a coalition. Satellite parties like MCA, Gerakan and MIC have made scathing attacks against the dominant core party Umno, blaming the latter's racial arrogance and hegemony for the collapse of their popular support within their own individual racial groupings.

Master-servant relationship

They have asked for drastic changes of Umno's policy – changing from a master-servant relationship to genuine partnership of mutual respect and equitable sharing – so as to enable them to recoup their lost support. However, Umno has instead moved in the opposite direction. It has intensified its racial agenda in an apparent attempt to consolidate and expand its core support – the Malay voters, at the expense of support from other races.

umno bn pak lah liow tiong lai event permatang pauh by election 240808 05This strategy is no doubt driven by the recognition that Umno still enjoys considerable Malay support, especially in rural areas, while BN has little hope of regaining support of other races from Pakatan Rakyat, which advocates a pro-rakyat policy within the framework of egalitarianism under the constitution.

The evolving scenario is polarisation of political development – an increasingly ethnocentric Umno relying on repression to preserve its political and racial hegemony on one side versus an unrelenting multi-racial reform movement that vows to foster national unity, restore democracy and rule of law and re-vitalise the sagging economy.

We thus see a struggling Umno, still being hanged onto by subservient racial parties which are themselves propped up by leaders with vested interests in the government but badly emaciated by disappearing grassroots. If a general election is held today, it is not an exaggeration to say that the race-based parties in the Peninsular – MCA, Gerakan, MIC - will be completely routed.

The scenario in Sabah and Sarawak is somewhat different where the BN coalition partners are mostly native-based parties and where Pakatan has not established a strong foothold. Their grouses are mainly regional marginalisation and failure to honour the 1963 Malaysia Pact (which grants them equal partnership with Peninsular) by the Umno-dominated federal government.

The Sabahans, who have been plagued by illegal immigrants that now outnumber the locals, have attributed their widespread poverty and under-development and severe social unrest to willful negligence and exploitation by the federal government. Many leaders have quietly planned or contemplated to cross over to Pakatan for a more equitable deal.

Meanwhile the backbone of BN – Umno – is at its weakest in history. It is bereft of political idealism, badly fragmented by power struggle under a feeble leader, and its body politic critically corroded by a political malignancy that has almost become synonymous with Umno – money politics.

Putrajaya ripe for the picking

sri perdana official pm residence 211108 gateIt is not difficult to see that Putrajaya is ripe for the picking by Anwar, since many BN leaders – including those from Umno – are ready to jump ship from this Titanic, having sighted the inescapable iceberg ahead. All that is needed now is a clarion call from the electorate in Permatang Pauh in the form of an emphatic majority to enable Anwar to embark on this historical mission.

But will the electorate of Permatang Pauh oblige? Perhaps this question should be answered by another question: is there an alternative?

What will happen if Anwar fails to win a convincing majority and his effort to affect the anticipated cross-over from BN is frustrated?

We will then see an untenable impasse that will put our political and economic future to peril.

For BN will continue its current effort to economically strangle Pakatan-controlled states through cutting off federal funds and canceling development projects, while stepping up repression through unconstitutional manipulation of state institutions - police, attorney general, judiciary, election commission and even the anti-corruption agency – to contain the rapidly growing popular support of Pakatan. Avowed reforms on the judiciary, police and ACA will surely be thrown out of the window, as these reforms are anti-thesis to a repressive regime.

As it is, our economy is already in jeopardy due to mismanagement under a corrupt and inept political leadership that seems to be perpetually pre-occupied with intra-party in-fighting, racial and religious squabbles, and sheer incompetence exhibited in frequent policy flip-flops, massive leakages and irresponsible squandering.

ijok by election day 270407 bn flagsHence, as tension builds up between BN and Pakatan, the economy will be further jeopardised through undue starving of federal funds and the inevitable shrinking of investments arising from further loss of investors' confidence as the rule of law continues to slide.

This intractable BN-Pakatan deadlock can only be satisfactorily resolved by one of two solutions: either Umno embarks on a path of genuine reforms to bring the country back to constitutional rule, or Pakatan takes over the government to institute the much needed reforms to turn the country around onto the path of national unity and robust economic growth.

Six months have lapsed since the political tsunami of March 8, and there is no indication that Umno is willing or capable of carrying out any of such reforms. Hence, there is only one alternative left: Pakatan must march on to Putrajaya without delay.

And the electorate of Permatang Pauh are now entrusted with the sacrosanct duty to make that historical decision on behalf of the nation.

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