

Sabah PKR's stumbling block - Anwar Ibrahim
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COMMENT The flip-flops in the continuing saga of Sabah Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), a troubled chapter, should come as no surprise to anyone who knows party advisor Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar has a long history of unfulfilled pledges in Sabah. This is a history which began with his entry into Umno in 1984. He stepped up his reputation further when the Barisan Nasional (BN) overthrew the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) government a month after state elections in 1994 with the elaborate promise of "Sabah Baru" (new Sabah) in 100 days.

The sole exception, pledge-wise, is the appointment of Kota Kinabalu division chief Christina Liew Chin Jin Hadhikusumo as the Sabah state deputy chief late last year as part of a peace plan. For this, credit must go to party president Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who is close to Liew. The rest of the plan is in ruins, thanks to Anwar, the only stumbling block.

Anwar is a political animal who does not say what he means and does not mean what he says. It's for no reason that Umno, his old party, has labeled him a political chameleon. What benefit he gets by adopting this mindset is beyond anyone's comprehension. Anyone would like to know where he or she stands vis-à-vis another. Those who don't subscribe to this ethic would soon be history as any good businessman would swear.

This is something to be said in favour of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad who is no doubt a hardcore racist. He leaves no one in any doubt what he stands for and never hesitates to let the other person know where he stands with him (Mahathir).

Anwar, however, is no Mahathir despite the fact that the latter is an original political animal. He lacks the flexibility and resilience of the older man.

So, it's highly unlikely that 12 senior party activists – 11 Dusuns, 1 Barunai – currently facing a one-year suspension will have their punishment reduced upon appeal. The sentence for their involvement in the aborted formation of Parti Cinta Sabah (PCS) will stand undiminished and perhaps even enhanced to push Sabah strongman Jeffrey Gapari Kitingan to his limits. This will take his 12 disciples out of the running for the divisional elections slated for Sept 18 and 19, if not the party altogether.

The likely result, even in the event their sentences are not enhanced, will be the inevitable departure of the 12 from the party.

Any discussion on a new deal struck between Anwar and Kitingan on the fate of the 12 would be an exercise in utter futility even if it doesn't fuel polemics. If the recent history of the written peace plan is any indication, the new verbal deal is as good as dead.

The PKR advisor virtually called Kitingan a liar yesterday. This was after the latter apparently pre-empted the renegeing on their secret deal on the 12. He prematurely disclosed the $12-9 = 3$ formula for the resolution of the crisis i.e. nine of his 12 men to have their sentence substituted by warning letters. The remaining three would have their suspension reduced by half and backdated to Jan 4, the date when the PCS application was officially withdrawn, according to what the Registrar of Societies reportedly told PKR.

Anwar has capitalized on Kitingan's pre-emptive strike to entertain his inner circle with his

own take on the 12-9 = 3 formula i.e. all 12 to be suspended but can appeal. The sentence on the three principal office-bearers of PCS would stand and take them out of the running for the Sept 18 and 19 polls. The other nine would be eligible. Their sentence would be back-dated to Jan 4 and reduced sufficiently to enable them to stand for the polls next month. This can be seen as another of Anwar's fairy tales if his rubbishing of Kitingan's take on the formula is any indication.

Kitingan and Anwar, it is clear, have been talking past each other for a very long time. This is very likely to continue and end in even more broken pledges to test Kitingan's patience to the limits of human endurance. Sabah rights, the Malaysia Agreement, the Tambunan Declaration, the 20 Points and autonomy are yet to enter the PKR Constitution despite many promises.

The Sabahan, as a member of the majority local community, sees himself as the rightful ruler of his state, an idea which is anathema to Anwar who is Umno unreformed, unrepentant. Mahathir may have taken Anwar out of Umno but no one can take the Umno out of him. He stands for Malay Muslim political supremacy in Sabah as well and justifies this on the grounds that "the Muslims are now in a majority in the state".

This may be true if one includes the illegal immigrants with MyKads who have entered the electoral rolls as Malay Muslims. Besides, Sabahans now number only 1.5 million while the foreigners including illegal immigrants have eclipsed them at 1.7 million.

So, Anwar's idea for the immediate future seems to be to make full use of Kitingan for his hidden agenda in the state while stringing him along until he has no further use for him. The PKR supremo figures that ten parliamentary seats from Sabah and an equal number from neighbouring Sarawak, both through Kitingan if he remains politically naïve and trusting long enough, will help put him firmly in the saddle in Putrajaya in 2013.

How going from the frying pan (BN) into the fire (PKR) benefits Sabah and Sarawak is anyone's guess on the other side of the South China Sea.

PKR, and by extension Pakatan Rakyat – despite DAP and Pas having some saving graces – will be another, certainly more degenerate, version of Umno and BN. There's still the possibility of making BN and Umno see reason especially in Sabah and Sarawak. The same cannot be said for Anwar given his dubious track record.

The writing is on the wall. Long before push comes to shove, Kitingan will leave PKR for his own political vehicle as his people have already been long demanding. In that case, BN will win once again in Sabah and Sarawak but by default if Anwar doesn't give way to him in the seats that he wants. The question of BN giving way to Kitingan's new political vehicle does not arise.

He could also return to PBS, which he co-founded in 1984 with his elder brother, especially if the latter becomes Chief Minister once again to complete Musa Aman's – another Dusun -- term. This is the hottest topic in Sabah today. If Joseph Pairin Kitingan becomes Chief Minister of Sabah once more, even if just for the run-up to 2013, the BN will win the state with a landslide. Not a single KadazanDusunMurut vote will go to the opposition.

The return of the KDM to the BN will make it extremely difficult for the Dayaks in neighbouring Sarawak to abandon the ruling coalition at this juncture. The Dayaks are looking to the Kitingans for their political lead as they lack leaders of similar calibre, the continuing polemics on them notwithstanding.

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