

NEW STRAITS TIMES

DATE:25/1/2010

Middling value in 'Middle Malaysia'

DAP'S new remedy for the nation — Middle Malaysia, sounds quite ancient and feudal—very much like the Zhou Dynasty's Middle Kingdom.

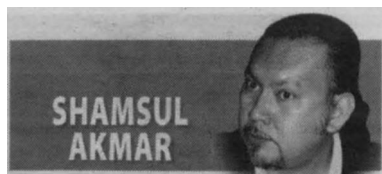
Even if the Middle Kingdom is attached to that which is Egyptian, it is still very feudal, a period when rulers were divine and a law unto themselves. But for most Malaysians, surely Middle Malaysia will echo that of the Chinese Middle Kingdom and not that of the Egyptian.

As it is, it has already been pointed out in the blogosphere that DAP's departure from Malaysian Malaysia to Middle Malaysia is an attempt to beguile the Malays who had rejected the former as a subtle chauvinist agenda.

Whether such arguments will gain currency is anybody's guess but the coining of the new slogan by DAP has attracted debate.

It is ironic because DAP stalwarts, its national publicity secretary, Tony Pua, for example, in promoting the Middle Malaysia idea in his blog, described it as "apt in times like this, as we swim in various parochial and fringe controversies like Allah and ketuanan Melayu", are now themselves accused of promoting "a chauvinistic fringe concept".

Pua, when explaining Middle Malaysia, said: "It is time to position DAP and our partners Pas and PKR as taking the middle ground where the overwhelming majority of Malaysians stand, while leaving our



political enemies to take the extremist position."

It sounds very reasonable albeit rhetorical.

But the more interesting aspect about Middle Malaysia is that DAP concedes that it will not be able to achieve it on its own and that it needs the all-round support of Pas and PKR.

This is unlike its Malaysian Malaysia concept which was promoted as a DAP exclusive. With the promotion of Middle Malaysia, Malaysian Malaysia may soon be a slogan of the past.

The first question now is whether this Middle Malaysia will be embraced wholeheartedly by DAP's partners.

The next is whether Middle Malaysia is the formula to break Barisan Nasional's domination.

While PKR may just adopt anything which can undermine or diminish Umno and BN, the same cannot be said about Pas.

Pas has, since the taste of the 2008 general election bounty, shown its preparedness to compromise on is-

ues which used to be its *raison d'être* such as the Islamic state and hudud, but on several occasions struggled to keep abreast of its secular and liberal partners.

Even in the *Herald* issue, Pas leaders have been unable to commit themselves to whether they agree on the use of the word "Allah" by those of other faiths.

There are those within their midst like MP for Shah Alam Khalid Samad who has shown his eagerness to be aligned with DAP and PKR in much of their political stance, justifying his action with Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions.

For that matter, even in PKR, the MP for Kulim Bandar Baru has on several occasions shown that he was opposed to the pursuits of DAP and his party.

Before the DAP can "sell" its Middle Malaysia to the rest of Malaysians, their partners would have to get their act together and remove their leaders who are still stuck in various parochial and fringe political principles.

Another question begging for an answer is if DAP can convince PKR in embracing Middle Malaysia — would not the separate entities become redundant, if not overlapping?

As it is, most of DAP's pronouncements are either echoed by PKR or similarly trumpeted. If Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) could see this and decide to embrace PKR, surely, soon-

er or later, either PKR or DAP must come to such a conclusion.

The only difference between the two parties now is that DAP has more non-Malays while PKR has more Malays and if they both decide to blur the racial identities, they should be able to exist as one and helm the Middle Malaysia together and not separately.

But it is doubtful that Pas can ever be with the others unless DAP and PKR accept its leadership and subscribe to some of its ideological principles.

Then, it can be wondered aloud if Pas will be accused of subscribing to parochial and fringe interests.

On the part of the BN, it will never be able to be one as it was formed as a coalition of separate entities intending to pursue separate interests.

That has been its strength and its bane depending on the ebb and flow of domestic politics.

If the respective races they represent are comfortable, even if not necessarily pleased, with the distribution and equation, then the coalition is in good stead.

That has been the formula since the days of the Alliance and the succeeding BN.

The acceptance of BN over the years is actually quite a feat given the fact that it is not ideology-driven unless its pragmatism is considered one.

Otherwise, it is a political bargaining by party elites and adjustments are made where and when necessary.

While detractors are accusing BN of being too immersed in race politics, the BN components have existed because each race wanted them to represent its interests.

BN is actually a reflection of what the Malaysian races are all about — the want for race-based privileges be they in economy, or in education.

If the Malay/Bumiputeras want their privileges in scholarships and other economic ventures, the non-Bumiputeras want their race-based education to be protected and defended.

For as long as the different races in the country feel that their needs and interests are best pursued by the politicians and political parties representing their race, the BN concept remains the most viable though not necessarily ideal.

Their detractors, though styling themselves as multiracial are never far away from pursuing these racial interests in their political quests.

The only difference is that the BN admits it is a congregation of race-based parties while their opponents proclaim themselves to be the epitome of multiracial virtues.

And how dare anyone equate Middle Malaysia with the Middle Kingdom.