

**Observers cast doubt on Pakatan's readiness to rule**  
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**By Ida Lim**

PETALING JAYA, Sept 18 — Political observers have cast doubt on Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) readiness to rule the country if the coalition manages to wrest control of Putrajaya in the upcoming general election, saying there are unresolved issues blighting their chances.

Lawyer Andrew Khoo pointed out that PR has yet to come up with a "shadow Cabinet" or a government-in-waiting, saying that this "restricts their credibility."

File photo of people lining up to cast their ballots in last year's Sarawak state elections. Observers say Pakatan Rakyat may not be ready to rule if it wins the coming general election.

"Although they have a common policy in Buku Jingga... (the) inability or reluctance of PR to form a shadow Cabinet... has meant they are unable to articulate what their policy is going to be," he said last night.

Khoo said PR's practice was to "always have a committee of three" representing the opposition pact's parties of the DAP, PAS, PKR, but questioned who is the most "authoritative" to speak on proposed policies.

PR has promised to change various policies as part of its electoral campaign, with recent proposals including making cars cheaper, fighting crime and tackling women issues.

"I have my concerns. To me, the great tragedy of Malaysia would be if PR won and then failed as a government. That would in some ways put paid to possibilities that there will be another opposition..." Khoo added.

Khoo said the law reforms undertaken by Najib scored points as a public relations exercise, but were found lacking upon closer scrutiny.

He was responding to a question on whether PR was ready to rule during a forum titled "New Political Activism and Realignment: Implications for Malaysia's GE13" here yesterday.

His fellow panellist Bridget Welsh said PR still has to sort out its differences over issues like hudud, the Islamic penal code, adding that the experience of its leaders would be an issue.

The Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition has been the only federal government since the country was formed, having previously ruled as the Alliance Party.

PR would also face the "challenge of working with the civil servants" if it takes over, said Welsh, an associate professor of political science from Singapore Management University.

"It is never the political parties that govern the country; it's the bureaucracy that governs the country. These are the people who have to make their decisions as well," she said, adding that it was "not about the party, but everyone working together."

But Welsh did not say whether she thinks PR — which is known to be composed of parties with different ideologies — was prepared to form the government.

Lawyer Lim Heng Seng, the third panellist, appeared to be more optimistic about PR's ability to rule if it wins the elections.

"It's a risk we should take. I don't think we should be overly anxious that Pakatan will not be able to rule," said Lim, a former chairman of the Industrial Court.

Khoo also commented that the law reforms undertaken by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak scored points as a public relations exercise, but were found lacking upon closer scrutiny.

"The problem with the prime minister's reforms is that they are crafted in a way that makes it look very good... but when you look at details... lack of liberty in what he has promised," he said.

Lim was more optimistic about PR's ability to rule if it wins the elections. Legislative reforms appear to give "mixed signals" and were "calculated and guarded" rather than "wholehearted", Khoo said, citing as examples the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 and section 114A of the Evidence Act 1950.

However, Welsh said that "credit" should be given to Najib, saying that it must be recognised that whoever leads the BN government "has a tremendous legacy" following Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's reign as Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister.

Both Najib and his predecessor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had faced great challenges, Welsh said, adding that there was "resistance to reforms" in their own party.

Najib, who became the prime minister in 2009, is the president of BN and also the coalition's main party, Umno.

Welsh said Umno's resistance to reforms had contributed to its losses in the 2008 general election, saying that the next polls will be a test of its willingness to accept reforms.

The political analyst had in her presentation earlier on said that Umno was its own "worst enemy".

"Divisions within Umno itself are its own worst enemy when it comes to elections. Their fate is determined by their behaviours and decisions."

Welsh said the issue of corruption, which was "endemic" within the ruling party, has given PR both a "common platform" to work together and an edge over BN.

"This is what is so challenging for Najib... he is caught in a vicious cycle."

She added that Malaysians must go beyond looking at politics through ethnicity, economic classes and the urban-rural divide, even as the 13th general election draws near.

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