

**PAS walking a political tightrope**  
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SINGAPORE, April 27 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) believes that it is now within touching distance of winning control of Putrajaya from the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in this general election after having made inroads at the 2008 polls, the Singapore Straits Times reported today.

It said that while the stakes are undoubtedly high for all three PR component parties, they are arguably highest for the Islamist PAS. This is because in toeing the PR line, no party has compromised — or risked — as much as PAS, with so little clarity on the road ahead, it added.

The result of the election will determine whether the progressives in the party, who have firmly nailed their colours to the PR mast, get to shape the future for the party. If the party does not do well, PAS's evolution towards a more inclusivist register could come to a screeching halt, the daily reported.

The paper reported that the party was caught up in the throes of Islamic revivalism and the Iranian revolution in the early 1980s, trading its ethno-nationalist credentials for religion. Under clerical rule, the party became a strong proponent of the implementation of an Islamic state in Malaysia. Led by the late Fadzil Noor, however, PAS was revitalised by the Reformasi movement of the late 1990s.

Since then, a strongly reformist and progressive faction has gained a foothold and flourished. This faction, which today finds itself significantly represented in the central working committee, the vice-presidencies and deputy presidency, has been active in expressing the Islamic party's commitment to the PR, it said.

The Straits Times said the path to multi-ethnic co-operation in the coalition has been riddled with potholes for PAS, many of which continue to pose significant challenges for the party leadership. The first signs of strain were evident immediately after the 2008 elections when PAS was approached by a weakened Umno to explore co-operation in the name of Malay-Muslim unity.

The Singapore daily reported that what followed was two tedious years of confusion and tension within the party. The more conservative elements were prepared to embrace the logic of Malay-Muslim unity as they harboured reservations about their new allies in the DAP and PKR. The opportunists were seduced by Umno's offer of Cabinet posts.

But the progressives managed to hold firm even as they struggled to reinforce the party's commitment to PR. They were able to do this because both conservatives and opportunists eventually toned down their own rhetoric for reasons of political expediency as PR's fortunes gradually improved, it said.

According to the report, even if the opposition coalition wins the coming election, PAS will find itself at a difficult fork in the road. The party is already in danger of bringing up the PR rear. In several seats, PAS is in the unfamiliar position of having to rely on non-Muslim votes to turn things in its favour. When the party undertakes its election post-mortem, this will surely be a hotly debated issue, it reported.

It also reported that even if PAS's performance pales in comparison to the DAP or PKR, by virtue of being on the winning side PAS could see itself in the role of kingmaker. This would surely prompt a rethink in some quarters of PAS about the party's core purpose, and the best avenues through which it can be furthered.

The progressives in PAS are unwavering in their commitment to PR. But the fact of the matter is that theirs is not the only voice in the party, said the daily.

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