

For PAS, Pakatan must be the priority, not the party
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COMMENTARY BY THE MALAYSIAN INSIDER

Supporters of Pakatan Rakyat (PR) or Malaysians who just want a better Malaysia may be tempted to apply liquid paper to the fault lines in this coalition, or just pass it off as growing pains of three political parties still coming to grips with different notions of race, religion and gender.

The temptation is great, but it must be resisted, strenuously, because this is the reality: the fault lines touch on the fundamentals of any attempt to make Malaysia a progressive and just country.

The only bright spark from the sorry Khalid Ibrahim saga is that it has shown PAS to have delusions about its own stature and grandeur.

PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang seems to carry a boulder on his shoulder regarding his standing in PR, and his camp is stuffed with politicians with serious reservations about working with non-Muslims and viewing women as equals.

But the most troubling fault line is this: PAS believes it should be the king maker and final arbiter on all decisions in PR, from the choice of the country's prime minister to the Selangor menteri besar.

In anticipation of winning GE13, PAS leaders picked Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah as their choice of PM. Little regard was obviously paid to the important fact that the prince, for all his bluster about transparency and good governance, is still a member of Umno, and in fact, seems unable to sever his links with a party he criticises regularly. But what PAS wants, PAS believes it must get.

Never mind that PKR and DAP were comfortable with making Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim the PM of Malaysia if PR had won GE13. In the minds of PAS, the majority view must give way to their way. Why? Because PAS leaders actually believe that they are doing the heavy lifting in the coalition and have the strongest support base. Therefore, they deserve to have the final say on all things in PR.

It is the same thinking that is making Hadi and his clerics believe that they should decide whether Khalid should be removed or retained as the MB.

Yet, there is no evidence that PAS has outperformed its coalition partners or is even carrying PKR and DAP on its shoulders. In fact, empirical and anecdotal evidence would suggest that for its bluster and posturing, PAS has been a let down at the ballot box.

It did not secure the rural Malay vote for the coalition in GE13.

Prior to joining Pakatan Rakyat, PAS had been struggling for its voice to be heard beyond the east coast. – The Malaysian Insider file pic, August 7, 2014. Prior to joining Pakatan Rakyat, PAS had been struggling for its voice to be heard beyond the east coast. – The Malaysian Insider file pic, August 7, 2014. Let's put it more simply, the party that has its roots in the rural Malay heartland could not deliver what it promised.

More than half of the parliamentary seats PAS candidates won were delivered because of non-Malay votes. In Selangor, at least seven of the 56 state seats held by PAS were won because of the overwhelming support of non-Malays to PR.

So in effect, it was DAP and PKR who helped PAS put up a respectable show in GE13, and not the other way around. The non-Malay electorate were willing to cast aside their long suspicion of PAS because of the inclusive rhetoric of Anwar, Rafizi Ramli, Lim Kit Siang and Lim Guan Eng.

To be fair to PAS, the electorate were also enamoured with Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, Khalid Samad and other moderate voices in the Islamist party, believing that the moderate and progressive bloc was steering the way forward for PAS.

In short, non-Malay voters were willing to support PAS candidates because they contested on the PR platform.

Without this important support from Chinese and Indian voters, PAS would have performed disastrously in GE13 and it would have returned to what it was before it joined PR: a political party struggling for its voice to be heard beyond the east coast of West Malaysia.

The party could not even hold on to Kedah, losing the state to Barisan Nasional (BN) after it refused to change a menteri besar who was not only out of his depth, but insistent on focusing on the form as opposed to the substance of Islamic governance.

Incidentally, it was this same combination that led to the fall of the Hadi-led Terengganu government in 2004, after just one term in office.

But this political reality is lost on PAS. Hadi and friends actually believe that they are in a position to dictate terms. They are not.

And it is time that PKR and DAP stand up to the bullying and posturing of PAS.

It is far more palatable to take the pain now and even at the next general election, than to go along hoping that the major fault lines in this coalition will go away.

The rhetoric of Hadi's camp about its queasiness in working with non-Malays, and their archaic and offensive ideas about women in high political office, are proof that PAS does not have the credentials to be a coalition with supposedly progressive ideas about governing Malaysia. Let alone lead it. – August 7, 2014.

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