

Selangor crisis exposes brittle ties inside Pakatan, say analysts
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The Selangor Menteri Besar crisis may soon be over, but what caused it to drag on and become messy, would likely cause more crises like it to blow up between the three ideologically distinct Pakatan Rakyat (PR) parties, analysts say.

Just like the crisis over the Islamic penal code or hudud in April, the Selangor MB crisis is a symptom of how the internal struggle in PAS is getting in the way of better cohesion in PR.

That struggle, said one analyst, is between leaders who are pro-PR and those who think the party is sacrificing too much of its ideals by being in the coalition.

That PAS managed to work things out with the DAP and PKR in the end is a good sign that the PR partners are learning the art of give-and-take, and the science of forging a win-win situation in a crisis.

But if PAS and its allies are unable to deal with this internal struggle and manage future crises that come out of it, the coalition won't get the public support it needs to get into federal power.

In April, the conservatives in PAS thought of ganging up with Umno to pass a bill in Parliament that would give Kelantan the power to enforce a 1993 Shariah criminal law.

The plan opened up a rift between PAS and its allies. PR leaders such as DAP veteran Lim Kit Siang predicted then that the coalition would break up if this issue was not resolved.

Three months later, the same group of conservatives again came out on the opposite side of their DAP and PKR allies, and decided to back Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim as the Selangor MB.

Again, leaders like Lim predicted that the future of the coalition rested on whether PAS could deal with the rift between these two factions.

Lim's prediction did not come true. But it has created the perception that PAS is a party that seems to always go against its coalition partners.

Political scientist Associate Professor Shaharuddin Badarudin (pic, left), said the drawn-out decision-making process in PAS was necessary in order to get a win-win solution.

"There are demands that PAS members make of PAS, demands the PR makes of PAS and these must all be balanced. This is the negotiating process," said Shaharuddin, of Universiti Teknologi Mara.

Which is why he believes it was necessary for PAS to propose two names for the MB post, Kajang assemblyman Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and Bukit Antarabangsa assemblyman Azmin Ali.

"If only one name, then the question would be why not just do it before? When there are two names it is apparent that there is that give-and-take," said Shaharuddin.

It was previously speculated that there were some in PAS who did not agree to Dr Wan Azizah as Khalid's replacement. They feared that she would not be able to govern independently as her husband, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, is the PKR de facto leader.

It had also been suggested that other PAS leaders wanted a greater say in who becomes the MB, as the party has more seats in the assembly than PKR.

These views clashed with those who believed that the choice of MB should be entirely up to PKR as previously agreed upon.

So in order to satisfy these different demands, a compromise was done, said Shaharuddin.

Another analyst, Wan Saiful Wan Jan, said that proposing two names is not a problem even if PKR only wants Wan Azizah.

"PAS did the right thing in putting forth two names. As having just Wan Azizah will open up allegations of nepotism," said Wan Saiful, who heads the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs, or Ideas.

The problem, said Wan Saiful, was that PAS's differing positions on the crisis showed that its internal struggles once again threatened how it worked with its allies.

"How long will Pakatan allow PAS's internal struggles to impact Pakatan?" he questioned.

When PKR first made known it wanted Khalid to be replaced with Dr Wan Azizah, it got the support of ally DAP.

PAS top leaders Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang had supported Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim as the Selangor MB, before the party decided to backtrack yesterday. – The Malaysian Insider file pic, August 18, 2014. PAS top leaders Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang had supported Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim as the Selangor MB, before the party decided to backtrack yesterday. – The Malaysian Insider file pic, August 18, 2014. Before PAS made its decision, its president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang and influential Shura Council pre-empted their party, coming out to back Khalid.

The Selangor PAS leadership also came out to say that it stood by Khalid against the wishes of its Pakatan partners.

Wan Saiful said PAS's shifting stance has eroded public trust in the Islamist party.

"They don't support Khalid now but for the past few days they were propping him up. The level of trust in PAS is now so low because of this.

"They should have worked within the coalition instead of letting it drag on till August 17."

Another analyst, Dr Wong Chin Huat, said that PAS needs to be clear of what role it wants to play in PR.

"If you want to stay, you have to stay and be constructive. If your presence is destructive, there is no point," said Wong, a fellow at the Penang Institute.

Wong believes that the only way to resolve similar leadership issues in the future would be to create a caucus system in the PR, where elected representatives can vote and show which candidate has the most support.

Professor James Chin on the other hand said that the crisis was also a clash of personalities between PAS's Hadi and PKR's Anwar.

Chin agrees that the Islamist party and its allies do have ideological differences. PAS still wants an Islamic state, a position not shared by PKR and DAP.

"This is the bigger picture and this (ideological) crisis will continue to create smaller crises," said Chin.

Wan Saiful puts it another way:

"Can you imagine if the PR were already in federal power and a crisis like this happens? It would be disastrous." – August 18, 2014.

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