

## **Despite Pakatan demise, two-party system far from dead, analysts say**

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KUALA LUMPUR, June 22 — The creation of a two-party system to even out the balance of political power in Malaysia remains possible — even inevitable — according to analysts, even as Pakatan Rakyat (PR) is left in tatters by the acrimonious split between DAP and PAS.

Dismissing claims that the country was already practising a two-party system when PR was still together, the political analysts said the federal opposition parties have little choice but to regroup under such an arrangement if they intend to capitalise on the groundswell against the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN).

"If the opposition parties cannot come to agreement, then it is likely that there will be many overlapping claims for seats and they will end up not being able to maximise their support," said Ibrahim Suffian of independent pollster Merdeka Center.

The reality of the first-past-the-post electoral system in Malaysia where only a plurality is needed to win means that contests other than straight fights would inevitably be to the opposition's detriment.

Ibrahim said the breakdown in ties between DAP and PAS has created a "fluid" situation that could see a repeat of the 2004 national polls that granted BN a landslide victory due to the split in opposition votes.

"The opposition grouping will probably hobble along until the next elections unless some major realignment opens up, which I think is unlikely," he told *Malay Mail Online* when contacted.

Aliran's Dr Faisal S. Hazis said the desire for a two-party system among voters is one of the reasons why PR had performed well over the past two general elections, stressing that there must now be efforts made to forge a new opposition alliance with goals beyond ousting BN from power.

Besides sharing a common platform that looks beyond political power, Faisal said the new opposition coalition must have a system to resolve differences, a clear set of policies and a fresh leadership driven by "the bigger picture and not be stuck with petty politics".

"Another lesson learnt is that the component parties should go beyond race based politics and religion. The Pakatan fiasco shows how divisive these elements can be," he said.

Malaysia will almost certainly see a "two- or more-" party system take root as the momentum of political democratisation picks up, says Oh Ei Sun of the Nanyang Technological University, even if it could potentially be weighed down by the rise of social conservatism in "some communities".

The senior fellow with Nanyang's Institute of Defence & Strategic Studies admitted, however, that the country still has to deal with short-sighted pragmatism among political parties that lack the direction of longstanding progressive principles.

"We will still have a strong opposition going into GE14, not so much because voters see them as better alternative, but simply because in many voters' minds, nothing could be worse than the status quo," he said.

In a statement declaring the "death" of PR last Tuesday, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng blamed Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang for the coalition's demise, saying the PAS president's recent actions as well as the Islamist party's decision at its congress this month to sever ties with DAP meant PR's Common Policy Framework was broken.

PAS on June 6 confirmed its decision to sever ties with DAP while still remaining in PR with PKR, after its motion to do so was approved without debate.

PKR president Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail said last Wednesday that the opposition pact will no longer function formally as a coalition, following "hasty" decisions by partners DAP and PAS.

She, however, said she hoped the spirit of cooperation between the three parties in Selangor and Penang would continue – despite the recent developments.

*\* This article was written by Joseph Sipalan, with reporting by Shazwan Mustafa Kamal and Ida Lim.*

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