

**Pakatan ends, and the lessons for a new pact**  
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**Commentary by The Malaysian Insider**

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) is finally and formally dead, and it is surprising that it lasted as long as it did. Its predecessor, Barisan Alternatif (BA), lasted a scant two years and was scuttled for the very same reasons – Islamist policies.

To be fair, PR was born out of a simple idea of avoiding three-cornered contests and having straight fights with the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN), rather than forming governments prior to the 2008 general election.

To DAP, PAS and PKR's surprise – the three-party pact with PSM in tow won the state governments in Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor apart from PAS keeping Kelantan.

And a formidable 82 seats in Parliament, denying BN its customary two-thirds parliamentary super-majority.

It took some time but the three parties formed governments in the four states although Perak fell within a year due to defections.

But the same leadership that agreed to PR and its common policy framework no longer exists in PAS. It has been replaced by a set of conservative clerics or ulama who believe that Islamist policies must take priority.

In 2001, this was the reason for BA's collapse. DAP walked out after the PAS-led government in Terengganu that insisted on Islamic laws to be imposed within the state.

In 2015, PAS's insistence on pushing the hudud, or Islamic criminal law, amendments in Parliament has led DAP to sever ties with the Islamist party's president, Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang.

In turn, the PAS clerics council pushed a motion to sever ties with DAP in its recent congress. It was accepted without debate in what is the party's highest policy-making congress and accepted by DAP. And now PKR.

Personal politics and a tight focus on Islamist governance by PAS including its insistence that women cannot take top leadership roles have sunk what was starting to be Malaysia's best opposition to the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN).

The common policies on economy, education and civil liberties have given way to a debate over religion's role in daily life. The hope for a better and freer life under PR where equitable economic policies and personal freedoms are encouraged have been overshadowed by public squabbles between some politicians.

After all, PR started out just to avoid three-cornered political contests, not to agree on what policies are best to govern Malaysia.

Even a better win in the 2013 polls, despite PAS winning fewer seats, has not taught PR a lesson on what peoples' hopes are for them and Malaysia's future.

Even Datuk Zaid Ibrahim's brief entry into PKR to formalise the opposition pact did not bring clarity to what PR was all about.

Instead, PR broke up due to political hubris, the same reason for BA to fail earlier, despite what has been touted as new politics. And the hopes of the 53% who voted for PR has also now fallen into despair.

Yet, there are lessons for any new pact that comes from the ashes of PR. That it is really about common policies best for a nation that is multi-racial, multi-religious and where corruption, abuse of power and poverty remain the big issues of the day – not a set of punishments and laws for just a section of Malaysians.

Malaysia belongs to all, not the select few who think they are entitled to rule due to their piety or political lineage. – June 18, 2015.

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