

Pandikar's decision bad for both PAS and UMNO

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An analyst says the two parties are now seen as working in cahoots.

PETALING JAYA: Dewan Rakyat Speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia may have done a disservice to PAS and Umno with his decision to interrupt the debate on the bill to amend the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act, according to political and social analyst Wong Chin Huat of the Penang Institute.

Both parties could lose votes because what transpired on Thursday had given the impression that they were working in cahoots, Wong told FMT.

"In the past, Umno may have been a Malay nationalist party but it was not a religious Islamic fundamentalist party," he said. "PAS was only a religious fundamentalist party but not a Malay nationalist one. Now the public will feel as though the two have become one, making them both Malay nationalists as well as religiously fundamentalist."

He said even voters who were not too happy with the opposition's decision to work with former premier Mahathir Mohamad would be left wondering which was "the worse of two evils".

"Some voters may not be happy with the opposition working with Mahathir but what happened on Thursday night may have pushed some of them into thinking that Umno and PAS are the greater evil.

"Umno, overplaying its hand here, is just going to get more people angry and this indirectly helps the opposition."

Wong said even the decision by Mahathir's Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) to open positions in the party only to Bumiputeras would be forgivable next to the perceived convergence of Malay nationalism and religious fundamentalism.

"In many ways, Malaysians who are not too happy with PPBM for putting up a new mono-ethnic party in the 21st century will now think that PPBM is by comparison much more modern than Umno and PAS."

He said it would now be interesting to monitor developments in East Malaysia.

"In order to survive, Barisan Nasional parties in East Malaysia may have to distance themselves from BN and Umno," he said. "I think they will signal that they are not Umno and are willing to say 'no' to Umno because they don't want people to be afraid."

He claimed that many East Malaysian Muslims were opposed to the amendments proposed in PAS's bill and questioned whether Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nancy Shukri's attempts to appear like a fence sitter would go down well with voters in Sarawak.

"To East Malaysians, their forefathers never signed up for a federation that is going to impose harsher punishments on religious misconduct.

"Take robbery, for example. Currently, you can only get 14 years' jail time at most but the amendments say the maximum the shariah courts can give you is 30 years.

"I know of Borneo Muslims who are pissed off. Nancy Shukri doesn't understand this. People like the late Adenan Satem and (Chief Minister) Abang Johari understand it."

Nancy, speaking to reporters last week, said a further explanation of the proposed amendments was needed as many non-Muslims might not understand them.

"I am a Muslim, too, but I must remember that for Sarawak, we have a lot of non-Muslims who may not understand this," she said. "Therefore, to be fair, we need to explain to the people. We have not even explained the details of the bill. How can we support it?"

Wong said most of the objections to Pandikar's decision to postpone the debate to July were coming from the opposition and this was not good for BN parties like MIC and MCA.

"Even when MCA was at its height in 2004, they never had the guts to speak out against Umno. As long as Umno bullies them, they will never gain credibility as a communal party.

"And MIC's weakness makes Hindraf look like a stronger representative of the Hindus."

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