

# Contradictions Plague Malaysia's Government

Monday 13 October 2008, by [QUEK Kim](#) (Date first published: 9 October 2008).

## Minority ethnic parties in the ruling national coalition get restive.

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As the United Malays National Organisation's political power has continued to wane since Malaysia's March general election, Barisan Nasional component parties like the Malaysian Chinese Association, the Malaysia Indian Conference and Gerakan are caught in a secret dilemma - whether they should feel happy about this development.

Happy, because a weakened Umno would give these ethnic parties, which have long been subservient to Umno, the first opportunity in decades to make an attempt to regain their status as genuine partners in the ruling national coalition, thus giving them the hope of recouping some of the lost support in their respective communities. Or not happy, because a lame-duck Umno may result in the loss of power by the Barisan altogether to the opposition Pakatan Rakyat, resulting in the loss of governing status by these component parties.

Expressed crudely, a strong Umno is bad because it would make the party more arrogant, further alienating its scant remaining minority support. However, a weak Umno is also bad, because it will not provide the necessary pillar for its satellite ethnic parties to hang onto.

Therein lies a fundamental contradiction in the relationship between Umno and its parasitic partners. This contradiction, among others, could doom the Barisan to eventual disintegration due to the structural changes that have taken place in the political landscape. These changes are:

- Minority races no longer accept harsh racial discrimination and are becoming convinced that their respective ethnic parties have failed to protect their constitutional rights, having been hopelessly subjugated to Umno's hegemony.
- People of all races have come to realize that the coalition government has grossly mismanaged the country through corruption and inefficiency, and that UMNO has widely abused the affirmative New Economic Policy for corrupt self-enrichment of party leaders and their cronies.
- The majority of people of all races detest racial politics and yearn for restoration of democracy and the rule of law, which have been steadily whittled away in the past few decades.
- The people have accepted Pakatan Rakyat as a viable alternative to incumbent Barisan, as evidenced by the 50 percent of votes cast in Pakatan Rakyat's favor in the March election.

## **Paradigm Shift**

After being subjected to the Barisan's absolute dominance for five decades, the paradigm shift represented by the above changes is spectacular, considering that the country is still under repressive rule. This political awakening would of course not have been possible if not for the rapid advent of the ICT revolution and relentless campaigning by Pakatan Rakyat. The beauty of this political process is that once the populace has become so enlightened, it appears to be irreversible. As time goes on, this enlightenment can only increase, as shown in the recent Permatang Pauh by-election that brought Anwar Ibrahim back to electoral politics and increased his party's number of seats against a strong effort by the Barisan.

The results of the by-election, as well as subsequent opinion poll, have shown that while Pakatan Rakyat's support from all three main races has increased, that from the Chinese and Indian electorate has grown even more spectacularly. This is an important signal to the minority racial parties in the Barisan that their days are numbered, unless Umno can make drastic changes to its policy of racial hegemony and corrupt governance. But there is not the slightest evidence that Umno is moving in this direction, despite harsh admonition and even warning of defection by its racial partners.

In this respect, the present crop of MCA and Gerakan leaders, who have been belting out chivalrous rhetoric with the promise to tame the unbridled Umno in the run-up to their respective party elections, can only be described as indulging in mass deception - deceiving others while in a state of self-deception.

Indeed the contradiction in the Barisan is not confined to that arising from Umno's big bully role, as a coalition of racial parties such as the Barisan is inherently a flawed political structure. Such a structure is only politically acceptable as a temporary measure during the early stage of a newly independent nation which is made up of disparate races, when the notion of united nationhood has not taken root in the consciousness of the people.

That is why the former Alliance Party - consisting of Umno, MCA & MIC - which gained independence half a century ago for the then Malaya, was considered an appropriate political entity to lead the country into nationhood. However, as the country matured, such coalition of racial parties should long ago have evolved into multi-racial parties to pave the way for true national integration.

## **- Racial Coalition Unacceptable**

A coalition of ethnic parties cannot be accepted as a permanent solution because it is confrontational in nature among its partners. As each racial party champions the interests of its racial group, conflicts are bound to arise all the time which necessitate constant negotiation and compromise. And it is inevitable that every ethnic party within the coalition would look at another party as an adversary in addition as a partner. The potential for friction increases in direct proportion to the degree of disparities among the races, whether in the social or economic field.

So long as such a governing political structure continues to exist, friction and conflicts among the races will remain an omnipresent feature of government, thus posing an unacceptable stumbling

block to racial integration and nation-building. Such a stumbling block becomes even more insurmountable if one ethnic party assumes hegemony and imposes discrimination against other racial groups.

Indeed, in the case of Malaysia, this stumbling block has become monstrous, as the dominant partner is not only dictatorial but has also become thoroughly corrupted, perpetuating its rule through abusing the country's institutions under the shield of repressive legislation. The devastation on nation-building is horrendous - worsening racial polarization, a deteriorating rule of law and an intractable economic morass, which has caused widespread hardships although the country in recent years has enjoyed unprecedented booming prices for primary commodities which are largely exported.

It is precisely due to public despair and disillusionment of such flawed political leadership of the Barisan that Pakatan Rakyat's politics of good governance and multi-racialism is welcome to bring new hope to the nation.

### **Heretical Ideologies**

In fact, following the recent political tsunamis swept in by Pakatan Rakyat, the nation has become increasingly aware that Umno's prolonged hegemony has deceived the nation - until recently, that is, - into embracing dubious myths as golden formulae for nation-building. Chief among these are the adoption of a coalition of ethnic component parties as a permanent polity to rule the nation. The conversion of extra-constitutional racial privileges evolved from the political agenda of the New Economic Policy as birthright. These heretical ideologies have been the major root causes of the serious political and economic ailments that have plagued the nation.

There are good reasons why Umno leaders have perpetuated these myths. They are to ensure that, through divide and rule strategies, party leaders' political power and personal wealth can be permanently safeguarded.

The leaders of satellite racial parties in the coalition cannot escape responsibility, as without their willing abetment to provide the façade of multi-racialism, Umno's hegemony could not have been so perpetuated.

At this time when the nation is facing unprecedented political and economic turmoil that may make or break it, it is the responsibility of every member of Parliament, in whose hands the fate of the nation has been entrusted, to ponder deeply what he must do that will most benefit the people. Should he allow the nation to drift as it is for another five years until the next election is due, or should he promptly act to contribute towards making a decisive break from the past so as to open a new chapter of hope for the nation now, without going through the hazards of a prolong corrupt rule?

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