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Coalition talk does little for the opposition's persistent challenges

By KWAN JIN YAO



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Parallels drawn to political developments in Malaysia do not change the formula needed by Singapore's opposition parties, especially when these parallels are hastily or selectively drawn, such as that between Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and former presidential candidate Tan Cheng Bock, should the latter decide to lead the seven-party opposition coalition in Singapore, says the writer.

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This is especially when these parallels are hastily or selectively drawn, such as that between Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and former presidential candidate Tan Cheng Bock, should the latter decide to lead the seven-party opposition coalition in Singapore ("**The Big Read: Opposition parties banding together — a grand plan or a last throw of the dice?**"; Aug 4).

In addition to differences in the socio-political circumstances of both countries, the most important distinction is that unlike the opposition parties in Singapore, the component parties of Malaysia's political coalition Pakatan Harapan have had a much longer and more sustained history of parliamentary victory and experience.

First, a coherent political message goes beyond a default one of being opposed to the Government and its policies, to one which realistically speaks to Singaporean aspirations and offers viable alternatives.

Some would argue that these are the challenges faced by the fourth generation leadership of the ruling party as well, and so this ideological contestation is critical and offers an opening. Second, quality candidates refer not just to the recruitment of fresh political blood, but also to an honest evaluation of those who helm the opposition parties.

The harsh reality of the decades-long electoral failure of the opposition parties cannot be easily dismissed, without considering the extent to which their leaders have been responsible.

Be that as it may, the structural hurdles against the opposition cannot be disregarded, whether it is the Group Representation Constituency set-up, or the shifting of constituency boundaries.

Even so, some parties have had modest electoral success, and it may not be a coincidence that they do not appear to have plans to join the aforementioned coalition.

Neither is it a coincidence, in addressing the third point on long-term ground engagement, that the parties excluded from the coalition appear to have better



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In this vein, perhaps the more immediate answers to greater success at the ballot boxes ought to be found from these parties, rather than illusions of and presuppositions about what a coalition may or may not bestow.

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