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A gurkha's view of DPM removal

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PAK Atan has been an Umno member for as long as he can recall. He is now in his early 60s, but his friends have refused to allow him to retire from active involvement in the party. He is just a gurkha, he said, explaining that this is the term he uses for grass roots leaders.

Being a deputy head of a branch in the city, Pak Atan is one of the key components of the party hierarchy. Before he retired, he was a technician in one of the many government agencies. I met him many years ago during one of my assignments in town.

As we've not met for a long time, I was pleasantly surprised to bump into him a few days ago. He is as fit as ever and always surrounded by friends, many of whom are younger members of the party from his branch.

After the usual how-are-you, our conversation drifted to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister. Pak Atan has definite views on this. He said not every Umno member shared his views but those whom he had talked to were definitely behind the party leadership.

Why did Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad removed his protegee from the power centre, he was asked. "Senang (simple)," said the old man.

"From my standpoint, Dr Mahathir doesn't want to subahat (abet) with Anwar. The PM is known for being meticulous. He's known for his attention to detail. Ask around if you don't believe me. If he visits a motorcar assembly plant, he'll be asking questions as if he's an automotive engineer.

"If he visits an aviation plant, he'll be doing the same. Which means that in the Anwar case, the same kind of attention was given, if not more. He wouldn't do anything in haste and in a rash manner. And the PM is a medical doctor, mind you ... bukan main-main punya (not the role-playing kind).

"If he thinks that the patient's legs have to be amputated in order to save his life, he'll do it. In this case, since Anwar would not only tarnish but also destroy the party, Anwar has to go ... Dr Mahathir loves the party more than he loves Anwar.

"Also, you mustn't forget that Dr Mahathir has repeatedly told party members that Umno cannot afford leaders whose image may tarnish the party's name and integrity. That's why Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib (former Selangor Menteri Besar and Umno vice-president) and Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik (former Malacca Chief Minister and Umno Youth chief) could not find a place in Umno.

"These two leaders had done much to develop their respective States but they have to take a back seat now. It's the same with Anwar. If, after gathering enough evidence, Dr Mahathir does nothing to drop Anwar, he'll be more guilty than Anwar.

"In Islam, the sin committed by the person abetting (subahat) an offence is far bigger, far more serious, than that of the person committing the offence. And I feel that this is the other compelling reason which prompted the PM to take this decision."

Pak Atan said grass roots leaders now have a clearer picture of the reasons behind Anwar's removal. A few of them said Dr Mahathir had to remove Anwar because he (Dr Mahathir) was responsible for bringing Anwar into the party and paving the way for the latter's meteoric rise.

The gurkha said he felt sad for Anwar, and even sadder for Dr Mahathir. Sad for Anwar because he had over-estimated his own ability to ward off temptations and his usefulness to Umno. Many more people, some perhaps wiser than Anwar, had played with fire and got burned.

As for Dr Mahathir, Pak Atan said he now has to look for another candidate to replace Anwar. "I'm already 63 and am feeling the weight of leading my small cawangan (branch). Imagine the Prime Minister, 73 years old this year, and has to bear the burden of leading the party and country out of this mess," Pak Atan said.

"Is Anwar ungrateful?" I asked the old man. He was not sure but said Anwar considered himself a man of high intellect. "He knows best, whether he's ungrateful or not," he said. I moved away as the old man's words sank in. Perhaps Pak Atan the gurkha, and Dr Mahathir the party president, know more than we do.

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