

29/09/1998

An appeal for calm and patience

Ahmad Din & three others

THE foreign media has used rather strong and sensational language to describe the situation and circumstances surrounding the dismissal and arrest of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister.

One foreign leader has expressed the view that Malaysia was moving towards authoritarianism. Reports relating to a nationwide crackdown, political repression, massive unrest and the alleged disappearance of Anwar have also been used liberally to conjure the impression that Malaysia's internal situation is deteriorating and there is an uneasy truce between Malaysia's law enforcement authorities and the supporters of Anwar.

The impression conveyed is that the situation is tense and trouble is imminent.

Malaysians living in Kuala Lumpur find this depiction of the situation in the country grossly inaccurate and misleading.

Life goes on as normal. All schools and offices go about their usual businesses. The shopping malls are enjoying business as usual, the traffic build-up in the morning remains unchanged.

In the evenings, restaurants open for their normal business.

There is no evidence of any unusual police presence or movement in the city. The police have issued a warning on illegal assemblies.

The newspapers have carried reports cautioning the wife of Anwar from holding political gatherings at her house.

This has allowed the area where Anwar's house is located to revert to its usual slow and tranquil pace.

Generally, Malaysians are greatly relieved that the ardent and some paid supporters of Anwar are no longer free to participate in rallies, marches and demonstrations.

The actions of these supporters and many more passive on-lookers on Sept 21, 22 and again on Sept 25 disrupted traffic and caused alarm and fear in the minds of many Kuala Lumpur residents.

From the date of Anwar's dismissal from the Government, rumours of all kinds, which seem to gather a momentum and authority of their own, began circulating as a result of the activities of his supporters.

These rumours had the effect of introducing alarm and uncertainty in our lives, something that most of us do not like.

Prompt police action in rounding up Anwar and a dozen others has helped to bring back normalcy as we know it.

We do not have to telephone and e-mail our friends and relatives for a blow-by-blow account of any civil commotion or disturbance.

The police ought to be praised and commended for their prompt and efficient action in containing the situation, preventing the occurrence of injuries or damage of public property.

Also, no life has been lost.

All Malaysians can understand that Anwar, his family, supporters and sympathisers feel aggrieved by the series of events since his removal. He was the fastest rising star on the Malaysian political scene and he personified the hopes and ideals of many, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Malaysian population was stunned by the dismissal of Anwar and rudely shocked by the revelations of the reasons for his removal.

A substantial segment of society still cannot accept that these

allegations could be true. Understandably the matter is topical.

Almost everyone is awaiting his being brought to court. Anwar will have the right to legal counsel of his choice, bail and other rights given to accused persons. Hopefully, Anwar can exculpate himself.

As with all court cases, it is difficult to tell the outcome. If the court finds the case weak, procedurally flawed or the evidence unconvincing, the case will be thrown out. As a high personage is involved, extra care and extreme caution will be exercised.

Let us hope a full acquittal and discharge is possible.

After all the avenues of appeal are exhausted, Anwar, his reputation battered and tainted, could emerge a free man.

Should that happen, it is within his right to seek reinstatement. He could go about this in a calm, persuasive manner. We should all recognise that a full restitution for his injured reputation is not possible.

His actions so far do not suggest that he wants to rebut the accusations. Instead he seems to have resorted to bully tactics and street protests to avoid being charged.

The activities of Anwar, since his removal, reflect a piqued, angry and highly emotional man.

His actions also show scant regard for the law. The law that is applied to him while awaiting trial is the same law from which he benefited in the past. It has given him protection, privilege and protegee status. The law has been enacted by due process, sanctioned by an elected Parliament and upheld by a strong legal system.

It is noted that Anwar often speaks of reformasi - the need to reform the current substance and style of governance of Malaysia. This call is being made in the context of the alleged corruption, collusion and cronyism that he says exists in Malaysia.

He is entitled to his opinion on this subject and the Malaysian media seem to give his views some publicity.

The call for transparency by Anwar is not at variance with the policy of the Government that he served until Sept 2 this year.

In his expose of reformasi, Anwar also makes many serious and wild allegations against the current leadership.

The import of the message is that Malaysians have a leadership in the style of Marcos or Suharto. Perhaps Anwar does not realise that we have a clean, clear and widely-accepted democratic process and tradition - unlike the regimes that were led by Marcos or Suharto.

Our Government has also not banned or bankrupted our opposition leaders like our neighbours.

We should snap out of thinking we are in Singapore, Myanmar or elsewhere.

But for the currency crisis, we were on the fastest track in Asia to minimising further the already low poverty level, addressing the question of redistribution of wealth and achieving greater social justice.

Now at a time when we must showcase political stability and normalcy, Anwar's supporters are attempting to hold illegal assemblies, incite defiance of the law and also possibly violence.

The restraint shown by the police in avoiding loss of life and bloodshed is commendable.

It is hoped Anwar and his supporters will respect and uphold the laws of this country and contribute to tranquillity - and not turbulence.