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Politicians cast stones at their own peril

Shamsul Akmar

KELANTAN Mentri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat is reportedly upset with Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim.

He felt the word "awak" used by Rais when referring to him was inappropriate.

Awak literally means you (awak-awak refers to crew members of a ship).

The Malays usually use an appropriate title when addressing their elders and almost never use awak, kau, engkau, kamu or anda, all meaning "you", although some are more formal in usage than others. Still, the use of any of these words to address an elder is deemed kurang ajar or rude.

Why Rais chose to use awak when referring to Nik Aziz is for the minister to explain if he wishes to. He could have done it on purpose or it could have been a slip of the tongue.

But Nik Aziz's reaction was interesting. This is probably the first time that the Pas leader has been affected by the choice of words of another Malay leader.

It is also quite refreshing since it has been quite some time since the issue of the choice of Malay words by Malay leaders on either side of the political divide has been discussed, especially with regards to their appropriateness.

The last time this happened was when Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor cast aspersions on Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's family name when the country was hit by the Nipah virus and pigs had to be culled.

Fadzil had then said that while the badawi (bedouins) in Arab nations reared camels and goats, the badawi (in reference to Abdullah's father) in Malaysia were taking care of pigs.

The remarks of the Pas president caused quite a stir and numerous quarters from within the Malay community were upset. But they did not include Nik Aziz.

To many, Nik Aziz's silence over Fadzil's remarks was not surprising given the fact that the former had prior to that defended the book "Shit" by national laureate Datuk Shanon Ahmad.

Nik Aziz had then lauded Shanon's book, which was filled with vulgarities and profanities, some of which were directed at Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Kelantan Mentri Besar argued that even God had used foul language on those who were condemned.

It is indeed a surprise that Nik Aziz is so sensitive over the use of the word awak by Rais in reference to him, given what was said by Fadzil about Abdullah and the choice of words by Shanon.

In fact, at the speeches and ceramahs held by Pas, many of the terms used by speakers against the Umno leadership are rudeness epitomised, and there has never been any real effort by Nik Aziz to put a stop to them.

At the same time, one has to start somewhere to deal with such uncouth behaviour and Nik Aziz might be taking the lead, never mind that he is sensitive only when he is supposedly the "aggrieved" party.

Nik Aziz may well be joining others in the pursuit of discovering the Malayness in them and the people who elected them. The Malays have always claimed that they are a race of good values and culture, and are tolerant, accommodating, soft-spoken and well-mannered.

But in politics, especially of late, these virtues seem to have been

thrown into the rubbish dump.

No doubt, a former Umno leader had some time ago suggested that the Malays should be a little kurang ajar but this was spoken in a specific context, and of course he probably did not realise how much damage the suggestion could do.

He is no more in mainstream Umno and need not deal with these problems.

But Nik Aziz, and other Pas and Umno leaders, cannot dismiss them. In fact, the on-going Umno assembly is as good a platform as any to revitalise the Malayness among its members.

After all, apart from intelligence, vision, dynamism and dedication, the qualities demanded of the Umno leaders include the basic values mentioned earlier.

If they can ensure that these virtues prevail, there is no reason why their efforts to regain support from the community should not succeed.

The pursuit of the Malay values must in fact be part and parcel of efforts to combat money politics.

If the present leaders of Umno were to reflect on the past, their predecessors were not only noted for their ability to lead but they also showed that they upheld the values held dear by Malays.

It is obvious the Malay populace is increasingly no longer taken in by money, position and patronage.

Pas may be getting away with it for now, but not for long.

Nik Aziz and the rest of the Pas leadership will soon discover that they too are not absolved of such sins regardless of whether they are ulamak or otherwise.

They too shall realise that as politicians they are living in glass houses, and cast stones at their own peril.

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