

Anwar Ibrahim - missing the man for the warts
Malaysiakini.com
April 18, 2007
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If we are to accept K Temoc's damning piece on Anwar Ibrahim and the reformasi movement as a valid verdict of voters' behavioural tendencies, then I can accept the people's resignation to the our pathetic political state of affairs.

But I do not believe that it is valid. It is, like many of the dicta by self-serving elites, simple self-rationalisation that smack of defensiveness and defeatism. Manjit Bhatia is absolutely right about Malaysians not wanting to rock the boat. And if I may add – at the slightest trivial excuse, especially by those who have more to lose if the boat rocks.

So Anwar Ibrahim does not qualify to lead the nation because he is supposedly a hypocrite? So how come Saifulbahri Kamaruddin's words are credible to K Temoc when in fact Saifulbahri is a self-confessed hypocrite? By his own admission, he earned money when he was a journalist, allowing things he believed to be untrue to be written in his name.

Now that Saifulbahri has retired, he has licence to take the moral high ground? But Anwar somehow does not deserve the time of day simply because he was once part of a corrupt regime? On the contrary, I think Saifulbahri still has the right to say what he says now. So does Anwar. The truth is the truth – no matter who says it. Let us be consistent, and not rationalise by selective reference.

I agree that we must apply high standards in the selection criteria of our national leaders. As malaysiakini editor, Steven Gan, admits, Anwar Ibrahim is a flawed man. So tell me who in the present cabinet isn't?

Our nation needs leaders who can lead. And we do not have many around to choose from. Or are we expecting a messiah who will come, somehow, some day to lead us to salvation? Not from the present crop of Hishammuddins, Badaruddins, Samy Vellus, Nazri Azizes, Najib Razaks, or Pak Lah son-in-laws, who are all as guilty or worse for double-speak. And not one arising from the present paternalistic and tunnel-visioned education system, surely.

This is not to say that Anwar shall get the responsibility to lead and change the nation's governance by default. In spite of his past misadventures, everything considered, he certainly deserves to be our prime minister. In response to Temoc's charges, consider these with an open mind:

* If it is alleged that Anwar is saying what he is saying now because he wants to be PM so badly, why did he not play dumb like Pak Lah as deputy PM and bid his time in slumber like Pak Lah did? He had to act before things got worse, took a gamble and lost, and had paid dearly for it. And things did get worse after that, didn't they? The fact that benign Pak Lah was chosen for the job indicated the vileness of Mahathir's defensive actions.

* The supporters of reformasi were from all races, only that some did so in different ways depending on covert cautiousness and cultural boundaries. The ballot boxes of the 1999 general elections were a testimony to this. Take off your velvet blinkers and you will see. The only ones who chose to sit on the fence in times of great moral crisis are those who fear falling off and losing their Protons.

* If the Chinese community is so set against Anwar, then why the broad coverage of his present activities in the Chinese press? He was not nice to the Chinese? Really? And to think that Mahathir, the alleged Malay ultra, became a darling to the likes of Temoc, irrespective of race.

* If Anwar has no credibility, why is he still the only national figure that can command tens of thousands at his 'ceramahs'? And why is the BN government so scared of his prowess, such that they will try not allow permits for his 'ceramahs'?

* Sure, he was once from the other side. Is that not a positive factor for bridging people of all kinds towards nation-building? Or does Temoc think that acceptance by all can come without the familiarity amongst Malaysians that he enjoys?

* Anwar has repeatedly challenged the BN government to charge him for money corruption to no avail. Don't we think that they would have if they have stuff on him? Maybe he was as smart as Daim Zainuddin in these things, huh?

* If Anwar does not have the fighting spirit that we sorely need in a leader and thinks only of himself, he would have accepted Mahathir's offer to leave peacefully with loads of goodies. Or better still, sing Umno's tune upon his release post-Mahathir and be accepted back into that gallery of rouges and join in the plunder gleefully.

* We live in an increasingly competitive world. We need time-tested leaders instead of 'ketua kampungs' who think that national leadership is about reminding us to lock our houses when we leave home. Anwar's credentials abroad are like none ever achieved by any Malaysian leader past and present.

* If versatility and political posturing by Anwar is mistaken for connivance, then surely all of our present leaders deserve to be dumped. And we will end up with the did-nothing monkeys that see no evil, hear no evil and say no evil as our so-called spotlessly clean leader. And where is the nation today? Great leaders in the course of human history were those who dare challenge for the mantle of leadership - not those anointed and then spin his 'greatness'.

* Finally, Anwar may not be the one at the helm of the nation, but he has taken that first brave step to lead by publicly delving into issues previously considered racial and religious taboos. Or does Temoc prefer backroom deals where leaders sell-out their race's and religious interests in exchange for being dogs in the BN manger.

We can choose to be fastidious in our search for leaders but let us not do so by exaggerating the warts and missing the man. And meanwhile, the world passes us by. I take comfort that there is still a voice in our wilderness that cares enough for the disenfranchised, while others in Putrajaya wallow in their greed.

In all, I am not embarrassed nor shy to claim as loud as I can that Anwar Ibrahim is my version of a selfless macho visionary, flaws and all, whom I want to lead this nation for the sake of my children and their children after that.

Let us speak up and be heard. Bashfulness, in this context, is not a virtue.