

Opposition must look beyond Ijok
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PKR Anwar Ibrahim's political standing in the eyes of non-Malays is one of suspicion. In the eyes of the Malays, he was their darling because of his oratorical skills, Islamic demagoguery and most importantly, he had the whole Umno machinery and largess at his disposal to secure his popularity.

We remember how he was happy to be Dr Mahathir Mohamad's lackey and contribute to the political tension in the country in 1987/88 by deliberately inflaming passions by appointing non-Mandarin speaking headmasters to Chinese schools, when he was education minister.

This culminated in the subsequent sacking of the Lord President and members of the Malaysian judiciary. The widely perceived lack of judicial independence in Malaysia has its roots in the 'political crisis' manufactured by Umno back then in 1987. It seems to be poetic justice that Anwar was tried by these courts during his infamous corruption and sodomy trials.

Now that he is out of Umno, he is realising that what the Malaysian electorate values most is material benefit. This is because our society has been divided along race and religion, as part and parcel of Umno's strategy, with its zero sum game political modus operandi. The idea of a universal brotherhood and concepts of equality and justice simply do not have much resonance with the average Malaysian.

Despite all the 'Islamisation' foisted on the populace with the non-Muslims being hapless recipients of unsolicited indoctrination, the general level of morality in Malaysia has plummeted to an all-time low. Anwar had no small part to play in the shameless exploitation of Islam for political purposes. Anwar rose to high office by playing the race and religious card. Islamic demagoguery was his forte and he uses it to the hilt, even now. His was brought in by Umno to give it an 'Islamic face' and Anwar fulfilled this role with alacrity by supporting 'Islamisation' policies.

As is the case when politicians abuse religion, morality is thrown out of the window. It is not surprising that every institution of governance has become drastically more corrupt and immoral relatively speaking since Malaysia embarked on its 'Islamisation spree', reaching new levels of ridiculousness and illegality when Malaysia was declared an 'Islamic state' by Mahathir, unconstitutionally, in 2001. The result is a dysfunctional society, with each community being suspicious of each other and working at cross purposes. What is valued only is power and material benefit.

Anwar can have a role in fomenting new Malaysian politics only if he renounces his old modus operandi namely, racial and Islamic politics. He must call for a moral secular form of governance where every citizen has equal rights. If he cannot or refuses to, then he may as well rejoin Umno or remain in PKR and drive it to sure oblivion. Only secularism can bring the people together in a common struggle for good governance.

To be quite frank, non-Malays are sick to death with any mention of Islam in politics because it is divisive and reinforces the gulf between the races and religions. The fundamental question Islamists must ask is why are they not obsessed about justice, equality, human rights, environmental protection, educational excellence and religious

freedom? Are these not Islamic values?

The brings me to the Ijok by-election; it is the people of Ijok who will decide in this election. And as such, bread and butter issues will decide the election result because Ijok is mainly a working class area in need of development. The people of Ijok will vote for anyone who provides them with material benefit in the short term. The newly minted 'universalist' PKR with its 'Jeffersonian Focus' just does not wash with the people of Ijok.

That is why, the opposition should look beyond Ijok, and galvanise a coherent and inclusivist secular political philosophy which all Malaysians can identify with.

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