

**Heavenly justice has longer arms**  
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has rejected the invitation by Anwar Ibrahim for a debate on the so-called 100-day reforms, and this decision indeed comes as no surprise to anyone.

Meanwhile, much work is being done behind closed doors to paint the opposition alliance in a negative light, and the tussle over the appointment of Selangor state secretary is a case in point.

As if this is not enough, a woman by the name of Ummi Hafilda (right) has been plucked from nowhere to add more innuendos in Umno's attempt to discredit Anwar and his allies. Ummi, of course, shot to stardom more than a decade ago in the first sodomy trial. With her head loosely covered, she now appears to be more 'religious' and 'pious' compared to her trendy outfits in the past.

In Malaysia, race, religion and monarch are the three handiest tools when one is pressed against the wall.

Najib has dismissed political debate as 'meaningless'. The truth is, the slickest prime minister in Malaysian history has never been known for oratory skills, and is therefore smart enough to turn down the invitation so as to avoid being publicly humiliated.

Anwar, no doubt, has his own agenda in making the offer. Had Najib accepted it, it would be a golden opportunity for the opposition leader to present his case on initiating political reform and arresting economic malaise, just as he did in July 2008 vis-à-vis Ahmad Shabery Cheek. There would be no better way to fight the media blackout by Umno.

As Najib has consistently shunned public debate, it would only strengthen the perception that the prime minister is a dodger, not a fighter.

**Vibrant political culture in 50s and 60s**

Many a politician in the ruling coalition has claimed political debate is only wasteful and time-consuming, which is not part of 'Malaysian culture'. The fact is, Malaysia did enjoy a vibrant political culture back in the 1950s and 1960s. Umno's general assemblies at the time were imbued with lively debates and insightful arguments, and a politician who rose to fame with his unique gift of verbal fight was none other than Mahathir Mohamad.

When he was prime minister, Mahathir had the guts to defend his position, even resorting to drastic measures against his opponents and willing to deal with the consequences thereafter. Time and again, he ignited political crises on a scale that no one dared imagine, but managed to win the hearts and minds of much of the electorate every time.

I am no fan of Mahathir and still hold him responsible for the deteriorating political culture in the country, but I do admire his courage to take the risk whenever necessary.

Judging from his character, Mahathir would not have chosen an open verdict on Teoh Beng Hock's death if he still was in charge. He would have gone for either suicide or murder,

while having engineered certain responses to handle the potential backlash.

### **Natural oratory talent**

Indeed, not many politicians in Umno's history have shown such audacity. Over the last 30 years, Umno has only produced three leaders with natural oratory talent: Mahathir, Anwar and Khairy Jamaluddin. One may hence question if this is healthy for a vitally important political party. Then again, Mahathir is rightly to blame for having killed off Umno's vibrancy with his authoritarian leadership that tolerated no dissent.

Najib, on the other hand, is a charlatan par excellence. A mediocre politician, he owes his political ascent to the 'true lineage' of his father. While Mahathir, Anwar and, to a much lesser extent, Khairy, have had to fight against the odds, Najib has had his status today handed to him on a silver platter. Of course, his dubious and foxy character is conducive to his career also.

Najib's latest move is perhaps to tighten up control on the Internet, claiming that uninhibited use of the technology is not part of 'Asian culture'. He should remember other major Asian countries such as Japan, Indonesia, India, Taiwan and South Korea are all stable democracies despite the unrestrained access to the Internet. That he is compelled to revive the long-dead Asian-values argument only goes to show that he is getting more desperate by the day.

Justice has long arms, and heavenly justice has even longer arms. Najib, and all other politicians who claim to believe in God, must remember even a powerful man like Saddam Hussein had to recite Quranic verses when he was being hanged. They must therefore not be deluded that they would go unpunished in the afterlife for whatever evil deed that they are currently plotting.

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