

Anwar changing, again
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For all my support for a two-party system and consistent opposition to Umno hegemony, I am proud to say I have never been a blind follower of Anwar Ibrahim. In fact, I don't even consider myself an "Anwarist".

Those who lived through the eventful days of the late 1980s - when Mahathir Mohamad won against Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah for the Umno presidency under most dubious circumstances and sacked top judges to save his own skin, culminating in 106 innocent men and women being put behind bars under the notorious Internal Security Act - will remember Anwar was firmly behind the tough guy.

Mahathir may not have been a dictator in the classical sense but there is no denying that his Machiavellian statecraft left incurable scars on Malaysian politics: the emasculation of the judiciary, a corrupt and trigger-happy police force, biased bureaucracy, and a sharpened racist and religionist agenda. It would not be unfair to say Anwar was part of it.

(And I am still wondering why some ostensibly liberal Malaysians would still choose to work for Mahathir by joining his Perdana Leadership Foundation.)

The first half of the 1990s saw Anwar metamorphose into the Renaissance Man. It did give hopes to the country initially, and many were quietly awaiting the exit of Mahathir that would usher in a refreshing political atmosphere. All this was brought to an abrupt halt by the financial crisis of 1997/98 that also triggered the severest political crisis in Malaysia's history.

I had always been sceptical of Anwar's chameleon character, but decided to put aside my differences with him because I then regarded the autocratic regime of Mahathir as a far greater threat to Malaysia's future. My position has remained unchanged over the years: if you have an issue with your opponent, fight him/her in a fair manner and on an equal footing, and safeguard the dignity of his/her family.

Most important, spare the people the ordeal of skullduggery.

Still, one would have hoped that six years of political and judicial persecution might change Anwar, but it now appears that the man is stepping deeper into the morass of unprincipled politics as he gets closer to the corridors of power.

Forced into a corner, Anwar sought to prove his moral/Islamist credentials by stating publicly that "homosexuals should be discriminated against to protect the sanctity of marriage". His open statement not only undermines his image as a progressive alternative to Najib Abdul Razak, but also ups the ante with Umno in the race over who best represents Islam, with the aspiring prime minister now declaring war on LGBT, liberalism and pluralism.

Deeply divisive issue

I fully respect Anwar's opinion on the deeply divisive issue. However, as a leader who aspires to take the country into a new era with some kind of paradigm shift, he ought to have been wise in choosing his words.

For instance, he could have made clear by saying "I disagree with homosexuals personally for religious reasons, but I am more opposed to discrimination against them".

Instead, he went a step further by endorsing those who are constantly on a lookout to portray homosexuality as a root cause of social ills!

And Anwar's opportunistic stance is a direct attack on my sexuality, as well as the green light for Malaysians - religious and moral fanatics in particular - to openly discriminate against me and countless other people like me.

The LGBT communities have long been a victim of political shenanigans. In the context of Malaysia, it is a surety to win conservative votes, be it Muslims, Christians or moralists.

I would have no issue with this had it come from PAS. After all, it is a party founded on the premises of preserving and enhancing Islamic values. But for the de facto leader of a so-called 'reformist' and 'forward-looking' party to say likewise is a betrayal of trust, for I know there are a sizeable number of LGBT people among PKR's supporters. But Anwar now seems to have made up his mind that they can be expended in order to secure more conservative votes.

Why is granting rights to LGBT persistently interpreted as destroying the fabric of society? Especially in Malaysia, even the right for LGBT to live as normal citizens would be a challenge to the 'social consensus'. Why should people be so afraid of LGBT that they perceive them as an imminent menace to the heterosexual institution of marriage?

No, you are not required to prove why it should be so, but the LGBT communities are constantly told to 'behave' and 'lie low' without a valid reason.

The irrational fear of LGBT is an emotional reaction that requires no explanation. As long as the Quran or the Bible says it is harmful, so must it be. No evidence is necessary, because more rights for them would entail less rights for us, period.

But isn't this us vs them mentality precisely the cause of our political malaise over the last five decades, during which time Barisan Nasional has been pitting one ethnic group against the other?

Imagine if Malaysia had its own segregation law that banned the Chinese and the Indians from front-row seats? This was what "keeping a low profile" exactly meant in 1950s America.

So is Anwar suggesting that, to ensure his entry into Putrajaya, he is ready to propose a law as such vis a vis the LGBT communities in Malaysia? It is his right to advocate that,

but I am certain the whole world is watching. Anwar must therefore be careful not to allow his dwindling credibility to drop as far as that of Najib's.

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