

**The devil you know**  
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**By Neil Khor**

Dr Mahathir Mohamad's comment about devils and angels had commentators and politicians going to town like headless chickens, proving once and for all who is the master of the game.

Ultimately, his point was very clear. In matters economic and social, the BN has an imperfect record but at least the song is familiar. There are nightclubs in the cities, huge factories converted into churches for the "born again", and even gay clubs for those so inclined.

In the rural areas, if the majority are Muslims, the way of life can be very "traditional". Only if you purport to worship Teapots will your lifestyle be curbed. If that rural community so chooses, they can tell their members that the sexes will have to be segregated in theatre halls and that the lights must not be dimmed.

The above is the "devil you know"; our lifestyles will not change and we can go about being Malaysian in whichever way we choose. This is the promise of the Barisan Nasional government, status quo circa 1957 with minor adjustments following May 13, 1969. Malaysia can call itself an Islamic country - by virtue of the fact that the majority of Malaysians are Muslims - yet retain its secular lifestyle.

Instead of a robust intellectual argument as to why sustaining Malaysia's unique lifestyle - one that is balanced, equitable and unique - critics have gone for the literal: Dr Mahathir admits to being a devil; the BN is the party of devils and Anwar Ibrahim is an angel. Really, how shallow can people get?

What is more appropriate is to argue that the BN has not kept to its promises made in 1957 and 1969. Society is not more equitable, government is not efficient and, as a result of its social engineering, we now have a general decline in standards in all our institutions. If the BN does not change things radically, we are headed for "failed state status".

This then brings us to the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) and whether that raft of reforms are actually being carried out? Here the opposition is having a field day for one simple reason - the PM has not been able to get all his cabinet ministers and the civil servants to his way of thinking. Without his own mandate, the GTP will not happen and Najib Abdul Razak knows that he has to win convincingly to get his way.

PM running against the clock

Not since the days immediately after independence has the Malaysian government been so open and accessible to new ideas. Yet, without the requisite cooperation from those holding office, these ideas will not be translated into action. In this case, as mentioned by this writer on the day Najib came into office, the PM was running against the clock. He keeps jumping up and down but remains in the same spot.

So much for the “devil we know” but what about the “angel we don’t”? Dr Mahathir was being disingenuous when he asked this question because it went straight to the heart of the matter: will Malaysia become less secular with Pakatan Rakyat in government?

Almost immediately, the focus went onto the issue of hudud as though it is the only thing that defines Islam and the purported “Islamic state” issue. Surely, by now, politicians and their spokespersons should understand that hudud is only one aspect of Islam. Yes, most of us don’t want to see people going around the streets without hands but I trust we will not be seeing its implementation anytime soon.

What we would like to see is Pakatan’s idea of a Malaysia under their administration. Will it be like Penang under Pakatan? Will it be like Kelantan, Selangor or Kedah? Obviously, Malaysia needs to be governed and some sense of federal-led policies with regards to national unity, defence and foreign relations will have to be agreed upon. Here is Pakatan’s Achilles Heel, we really don’t know whether it can hold it together after it defeats the BN.

Who will lead the Pakatan cabinet? What will its complexion be like?

What about leadership?

We have the Buku Jingga, which tells us roughly that it will be a welfare-oriented state that is still very much capitalist in policies; we know from their track record especially in Penang and Selangor that it is serious about dealing with corruption; and that it will continue to have a kind of duality, leaving Muslim majority states like Kedah and Kelantan to go about their business in their own way, but what about leadership?

To date, there is no shadow cabinet and the challenges to current BN policies are ad-hoc and reactionary. Of course, our expectations may be too high and some have said that we should try to understand that Pakatan is under constant BN “attacks”. But that is the nature of the beast.

One Pakatan politician once said “if you cannot stand the heat, get out of the kitchen” and it goes both ways. As such, it is not too much to expect to know what sort of government we will be getting when and if the BN is voted out.

In fact, that is the best reply to Dr Mahathir’s statement: “Better the devil you know and the angel you don’t”. By making explicitly clear what sort of government we can expect, Pakatan will allay fears from all communities in Malaysia.