

Ini kali lah!
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By Josh Hong

The apprentice prime minister has decided to go to the country, finally.

While the BN-friendly mainstream media have been trying to drive a wedge between the opposition parties by raising the issue that Anwar Ibrahim's candidature as prime minister is yet to be openly endorsed by PAS, these discredited "senior journalists" choose at the same time to gloss over the fact that Malaysians did not opt for Najib Abdul Razak either when they cast their ballots on March 8, 2008.

Indeed, Najib has shown no shame in occupying Seri Perdana together with his wife for longer than necessary, lacking utterly the courage to seek his own mandate for a full four years.

Some have defended him by citing Gordon Brown, who took over just before halfway from Tony Blair in 2007. But Blair had made it clear to the British electorate that he would hand over the administration to Brown at a later date if he won the 2005 general election. In other words, British voters had been well informed before they cast their votes for the Labour Party, and those who disagreed with the arrangement had the right to vote differently.

On the contrary, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had made no such plans at all. The tsunami came all at a sudden, rocking the establishment to its core and reshaping Malaysia's political landscape in more ways than one, eventually sweeping Abdullah from power thanks to shenanigans and cunning engineering by Mahathir Mohamad and Muhyiddin Yassin. True to form, Najib got to reap the fruits of treachery and the rest is history.

Unlike many who claim self-righteously that the 13th general election will be fought on popularity rather than policy, and that it would amount to nothing more than 'more of the same', I am convinced the upcoming battle is really about whether Malaysians are ready for a paradigm shift.

Just look at the opposition alliance. Granted, it is made up of three parties with disparate ideologies, but what is not in dispute is that none of them is dominant enough to impose its will on the others. Compared this to Umno which has an omnipresence across the country except for Sarawak, complete with a monopoly on the country's resources and public institutions, wouldn't a new dawn usher in a different political culture that may help move the nation forward?

Judging from the way MCA, MIC, Gerakan and the People's Progressive Party - often crying for milk like a baby - are begging for their crumbs, a break from the political chain would also give them a chance to redeem some dignity and walk slightly taller in the eyes of the public.

Secondly, racial politics is so entrenched that it cannot be rid of without breaking Umno's dominance. While it is true that PAS as guided by religious principles could pose a challenge to a new government, the Islamic party, contesting only one-third of the parliamentary seats, would not be in a position to run the country as the racist Umno has been doing for more than five decades.

A golden opportunity

A full democracy entails the capacity to check and balance, and this can only be secured when national politics is not monopolised by one single party. On the other hand, PAS's presence in the coalition would also assure the Muslim electorate of its interests. The upcoming election hence provides a golden opportunity that one misses at one's own peril.

Thirdly, unlike those who believe more and more non-Malays are opting for Pakatan Rakyat because they are tired of Malay leadership and now want to seize the moment to 'get their own back', the opposition pact presents an attractive choice because it is multiracial and founded on an equal footing, with capable Malay leaders as its backbone.

Just mention to the Chinese names like Nurul Izzah Anwar, Rafizi Ramli and Khalid Samad, and you will see more applause than if it is Chua Soi Lek, Liow Tiong Lai and even Ong Tee Keat.

Yes, there is now a rare opportunity for Malaysians to put the notion of non-racial politics to the real test. It may or may not succeed, but I know for sure another mandate for Umno would only mean its tested formula is still working well and there would be no seismic change for decades to come.

Last but not least, many innocent lives have been lost due to Umno's inefficacy, arrogance and abuse of power. I cannot emphasise enough that the upcoming election is not just about Teoh Beng Hock, but may also be the last opportunity for Malaysians to seek justice for those who died in custody and detention, as well as for those who have risked and even sacrificed their lives to tell us what has gone wrong with this country.

Think of PI Balasubramaniam, Ahmad Sarbaini Mohamed, Kugan Ananthan, Aminulrasyid Amzah and many others. You know who they are.

We would be cursed for not even trying to right what is terribly wrong, and to do so must first involve removing Umno from power. Every Umno prime minister has over-promised and under-delivered. One of them, ie. Mahathir Mohamad who started shamelessly with the slogan of 'Bersih, Cekap dan Amanah', nearly sent us to hell. What does Najib have to make us believe he would be different?

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