

## **Cease being soft on hard issues, Zaid tells Anwar**

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When the Barisan Nasional leader is unwilling to offer a solution for the "Allah" imbroglio, the people expect the opposition supremo to show that he is made of sterner stuff.

And since this has not happened, former law minister Zaid Ibrahim is disappointed that Najib Abdul Razak and Anwar Ibrahim are the only choices for Malaysians.

"I am disappointed that Anwar has once again failed to show leadership when it is urgently required," he wrote in his latest blog posting.

The former Pakatan leader called on the opposition bloc to be bold enough to offer solutions for the difficult religious and ethnic issues which Umno seems adept at creating.

"Pakatan can only be stronger if they can take on Umno on these issues by presenting comprehensive solutions and not shying away as they are prone to do.

"It is time Pakatan showed their resolve and conviction by presenting to the country with ways of resolving the 'Allah' issue in a practical manner.

"It is time they show they are made differently from Umno," he said.

Zaid was commenting on the call by Selangor assemblypersons Yeo Bee Yin and Lau Weng San to repeal the Selangor Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Among Muslims) Enactment 1988.

Calling it a "sensible and brave" suggestion, Zaid, however, said the two were harshly criticised by their Pakatan colleagues, including Anwar.

The Enactment prohibits non-Muslims from using a slew of words, including 'Allah', with regard to practicing their respective faiths.

"Aside from these two young lawmakers, no one else has had the guts to show Selangor and the rest of the country a way to resolve the issue," said Zaid.

Decision made three years ago

After all, Zaid pointed out, Pakatan had made a decision on this matter three years ago, where it felt that it was best to allow the use of the word 'Allah' for prayers and in the Bible, provided the word was not abused, for example, to deceive Muslims.

"In other words, the hard decision has been made. If Pakatan believes in its own decision and is willing to hold to it, then it is only logical that it supports the repeal of the Enactment," he added.

The "mischief" that the Enactment sought to address, explained Zaid, is the forced conversion of Muslims.

"Banning 35 words, including 'Allah', cannot possibly achieve that purpose, especially when the ban would entail infringing on the rights of Christians and Sikhs in the country, as well as on schoolchildren singing the state anthem.

"If such an impractical piece of legislation is allowed to remain in the statute book, then one must not complain if Jais or other enforcement agencies go on acting in the manner that they have," he said.

Zaid said if the issue is the vulnerability of Muslims being "unknowingly" converted into Christianity, then a new law to address the issue of conversion needs to be enacted.

"That is all there is to it. Pakatan, especially PAS, have enough Muslim scholars and intellectuals who can explain to Muslims that the Enactment, the brainchild of Umno, is ill-suited to address this 'mischief'. Further, the Enactment is ultra vires the Constitution in my view.

"It seems to me that Pakatan always recoils under pressure when presented with Umno's religious propaganda. I can't fathom why. Islam is not an illogical or insensible religion. The liberating force of Muslim ethics and morality is universally known, and there is an adequate body of work from religious scholars – past and present – that can be used to defend the principles of the Constitution.

"How is Pakatan going to move forward and present the country with new policies and new, highly-qualified muftis that can ensure peace and harmony if they continuously tie themselves to the ghosts created by Umno?" he added.

People want real change

Zaid called on Pakatan to declare the Islamic principles the coalition wishes to offer to Malaysian institutions for a better country and still live within the context of laws and demands of the Federal Constitution.

Pakatan, he added, must offer a "thinking" policy statement so that ignorance can be slowly dealt with.

"As Umno thrives on the ignorance and fear of Muslims, so Pakatan and PAS must do the opposite to liberate them.

"They must not be easily scared about possibly losing votes in doing so. If this is the case, then they are being unduly opportunistic and are clearly prepared to sacrifice their principles for political victory. What then are they fighting for?

"Pakatan's strategy of withholding on the sensitive issues and dealing with them later, when power comes their way, will not work.

"The people are only interested in real change. Muslims also surely want a country that is not Islamic in terms of slogans and cosmetic change, but a country that is truly just and fair for all God's creations," he added.

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