

Najib, please, listen to these words of mine

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COMMENT Taking advice from me at this hour of great turmoil in your life is furthest from your mind, but as a former colleague (albeit a brief one), I feel there is no harm trying, just in case there is a one-in-a-million chance you will read this.

I know you never liked me, as you objected vehemently to Pak Lah (fourth prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) when he told you he wanted me in the cabinet in 2008, but I have no hard feelings against you and my disappointment is just that all the promises of reform you talked about have never happened.

You must step down as prime minister, because there is no way you can get out of this hole. Remaining in office will just exacerbate the country's problems and the people's sufferings.

Nothing you do henceforth will make the people of this country trust you, and you will not be able to govern effectively in such a situation.

For once, do not believe what your star-gazers tell you. Your colleagues, friends and advisers will want you to stay, but not necessarily because they care about you.

I suggest you announce your resignation to take effect at the end of the year, and in the next six months you must do three things that will in some way atone for your sins and mitigate the errors committed under your watch.

You must salvage something of your life as prime minister, despite all that has happened. The greatest scourge the country faces is corruption and that, dear prime minister, is what you need to address as your lasting gift to the country.

Changing of the guard won't remove abuses

No changing of the guard will remove greed and abuse of power from the system but you can do the following before you leave:

Firstly, revisit the Official Secrets Act and make substantial amendments to ensure it is used only to protect military secrets and the security interests of our country. The Act should not protect and hide government contracts and financial dealings.

There must also be openness in all government affairs so that your successor, ministers and elite civil servants will be more careful with public funds.

Secondly, have your ministers and the chairpersons of Off-Budget agencies, their spouses and family members declare their assets for public scrutiny.

You know I tried to do this without success, but perhaps after what has happened, the BN ministers will now have a change of heart. Also, introduce a law under which the prime minister is prohibited from assuming other portfolios, especially finance.

Finally, legislate on political funding so that the taxpayers contribute a sufficient amount to major political parties to cover election expenses.

Mitigate this need for money by political parties

It is unrealistic to expect political parties not to be corrupt and abuse their powers when they need money for elections and other activities. We need at least to mitigate this need for money by providing some contributions to them. Other democracies have done this and so should we.

I believe if you do these three simple things, corruption will be greatly reduced and we can start with good governance and the implementation of good policies from there.

The country needs a new direction and a new team of leaders. You can, of course, ignore what I have said and remain as prime minister for the next 10 years, but the people will remember you for Altantuya Shaariibuu, 1MDB and the AmPrivate Banking account. However, if you leave a legacy of tackling corruption, even if you just put these initial measures in place, you will be remembered differently.

In six months you could transform the country, which no one in your team today is willing to do. You will be remembered as a man who redeemed himself. The choice is yours, Najib!