

**COMMENT | It is time for Anwar**

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COMMENT | PKR president Anwar Ibrahim has an appointment with history on Tuesday and many hope Malaysia will be better off when he becomes the 9th Prime Minister.

Not everyone will agree, but at least it will once and for all remove the monkey on the backs of both former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar.

Their long-standing feud has been at the people's expense when Mahathir failed to see through Anwar's ascension to the top post twice - the most recent time being the derailment of the Pakatan Harapan reform train.

The news that Anwar has garnered support from Umno members, as well as Sabah and Sarawak representatives, as reported by Malaysiakini based on a PKR source, remains to be seen, and is set to be revealed when he meets the King.

Current affairs in Malaysia have reached an unhealthy and uncertain phase. Nothing that needs to be said has been omitted from social media and online publications. Nothing except perhaps an end to Anwar's ordeal.

Efforts to establish good governance must be relentless after the rhetoric. And we have heard it all before, the platitudes and promises, the criticisms and complaints. Hence the need to echo the call until there is reform and systemic change in place and with it, a new quality of leadership.

Will Anwar deliver on Tuesday? Will he deliver if he clinches the top job? Time will tell.

But fair-minded Malaysians think Anwar needs the break to vindicate himself. After all, Mahathir and Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin were given more than their fair chances.

The current political fragmentation has seen a rise of political warlords pushing vested interests that can't be in the national interest.

When influential people and the public do nothing to stop the undeserving and unsuitable from gaining power, then they have made their choice by default. They should not complain.

Most people have more hindsight than foresight, and it is foresight that could save a country from future problems. Imagine Malaysia as an impoverished country with not enough jobs for everyone. This is a foreseeable future.

Many Malaysian visa overstayers in Australia and elsewhere are working illegally. And Mahathir wanted the country to have a 75 million population years ago?

Indifference and apathy, the persistent supporting of corrupt politicians, who were all legally and democratically elected, is why Malaysia is still suffering from a moral pandemic more pervasive and pernicious than Corvid-19. It is frightening.

When a convicted leader is not "flogged" and shamed, but touted as a "comeback kid", when a hellion is treated as a hero and given a job at the top, then as they say, "Houston, we have a problem". Only this time, it is Malaysia, again.

A weak leader trying to cling to power with a tenuous parliamentary majority is highly vulnerable to unfair, unreasonable and unprincipled demands from the corrupt who prop him up.

Such a leader will inevitably practise the politics of appeasement and do what is

expedient, not necessarily what is proper and moral.

For years now, the nation has seen the government accommodate the religious pressure groups resulting in a nation that is now unrecognisable and fundamentally different today.

It is telling that Perak ruler Sultan Nazrin Shah said there has been a decline of values in the country, despite an increase in the number of religious institutions.

He lamented the loss of integrity and trust of a bygone generation of Malays who had strong faith and principles.

The sultan said their religious teachers had no diploma or degrees yet succeeded in building "strong integrity within the Malay community, which prevented them from committing acts that would threaten their dignity."

"It kept many Malay-Muslim officers from doing evil and sinning through breach of trust, corruption and misuse of power," he further said.

Sultan Nazri Shah cited an unpleasant incident and asked, "Is the level of poverty so great that it would cause villagers from two different villages to fight over food that's not theirs from a lorry spill?"

This is reflective of the no-holds-barred political mudslinging today that deploys dirty politics, sex tapes, and slander through hatched crimes as in Anwar's ordeal.

Covetousness has replaced contentment, once a traditional virtue, especially among Malays. What was once enough for many is now not enough.

Grabbing what you can, however you can, is a universal human flaw and every ethnic community has its black sheep. Still, the Malays as a community were, in the old days, respected for their simplicity and honesty.

In essence, the Perak ruler's lamentation is not something new but it had to be said. But rectifying the malaise is mission "very tough", if not mission impossible.

What has happened in the intervening years to Islam is what Mahathir once described as the inordinate emphasis on "form over substance".

In those bygone days, we had never seen a young woman in a tudung (headscarf). Today, a young Muslim woman who refuses to wear one has to invest in a suit of armour. She is pilloried left, right, and centre. Ask Maryam Lee, who is fighting for hijab freedom.

As a result, the inordinate emphasis on appearance and conformity have become the norm. Many Muslims are pressured to conform and not think for themselves. They can't take all the blame when it is nigh impossible to dissent under the circumstances.

And differing opinions in Islam are condemned swiftly by zealots. Thus, religion becomes a sensitive topic, even coercive and exploited by corrupt and irreligious politicians.

The "Arabisation" of Islam has much to do with the changes seen in Malaysia to the detriment of traditional Malay images, culture and mindset. Whether this is good, bad or irrelevant is for the Malays themselves to decide. For non-Malays, we like the Malays the way they were.

Integration, where once Malays dined next to non-Muslims in open eateries, are long gone. Instead, there is a level of segregation in the peninsula, which is not seen in Sabah and Sarawak, in our neighbour Singapore or even in other Muslim-majority countries.

It is understandable why Johor plans to restore the ethnic and religious emphasis there on the Malay civilisation.

The state's action of severing links with the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (Jakim) and scrutiny of sermons in Johor mosques makes sense. Instead of nabbing the big fish and more serious sins, the religious police instead nab the small fry. Did we hear even a whimper from religious leaders against corruption in high office?

Still, any historical account of Malaya cannot leave out the important role of the Chinese and their close ties with the royal house in Johor in a bygone era. The Malay rulers had much to thank China, the Middle Kingdom that protected them from Siamese aggressors.

Few will object to Anwar allying himself with Umno politicians, as long as those politicians are not facing criminal charges or have a bad reputation and recorded in corrupt dealings. After all, nearly every Malay politician has an Umno history.

More than ever, Malaysia needs a unifying leader. Party politics, as I wrote before, is meaningless with all that frog jumping. I have real frogs in my garden but I hardly see them jump.

I see politicians who are not facing charges joining Anwar as different from the frogs who jumped for money. An Anwar government may be what the doctor ordered for the sake of the nation. Then history will have come full circle, and

justly so, for Anwar.

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