

## **COMMENT | Race and religion narrative - dicing with danger**

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COMMENT | The term “gracious” is seldom found in a politician’s lexicon, particularly when it is the prefix for the word “defeat”.

Donald Trump is a classic example. Losing the presidential election left him incandescent, turning his amber complexion to a shade of crimson.

Repudiating the results, he projected himself a victim and rallied his supporters, most of whom were conservative white Americans with strong religious convictions, more than eager to believe that all those of a different colour and creed were hellbent on upending the foundations of the United States and diluting its whiteness.

The message was simple. It was a stolen election.

Several right-wing media outlets and individuals, including religious personalities, lent credence to this allegation, further polarising the nation.

Following the recent general election, a similar scenario is unravelling in Malaysia.

The target audience is Malay Muslims, who are fed the claim that the premiership and government have been hijacked, to the detriment of their race and religion.

Apart from Anwar Ibrahim's alleged sexual orientation and his Jewish link, detractors have also warned about the most sinister element within this new framework - DAP - whose *raison d'être*, according to them, is to either replace the crescent with a cross or the hammer and sickle. Not to forget, it also wants to strip the Malays of their superior position as well.

To the purveyors of communal unrest in Malaysia, the term Chinese is interchangeable with DAP whereas all Malay Muslims in Pakatan Harapan are abetting them and other minorities to trample on their race and religion. Granted, DAP, like all other parties, has its fair share of monstrous egos, acerbic tongues and deep-set prejudices but some of the allegations levelled against it are absurd.

Similar to the US, there are media organisations and individuals as well as religious figures that appear to propagate this propaganda crafted along racial and religious lines in the Malaysian context.

For example, soon after the Harapan chairperson was proclaimed as prime minister, one media outlet headlined an article that gaming and alcohol-related stocks were up. There was, however, no mention of the ringgit soaring to a three-month high.

Later, it published another report quoting the top editor of an influential Israeli newspaper stating that Anwar's appointment could signal a new chapter in the Jewish state's relationship with Malaysia.

However, there appeared to be no mention of Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh congratulating the prime minister on his appointment and stating that he looked forward to the latter's continued support of the Palestinian cause.

In the aftermath of Perikatan Nasional losing its bid to form the government, there were also attempts to cast aspersions on the rulers' wisdom.

If the roles were reversed and Harapan had made such an insinuation, the pitchforks would have been raised and there would be demands for the heads of the infidel immigrant ingrates to roll.

True to form, a Malaysian blogger, residing some 6,000km from home, has been pouring litres of gasoline into the fire, perhaps emboldened that if the nation

goes up in flames, he would remain unscathed in Manchester.

Apart from accusing Umno president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi of hoodwinking the rulers, he also suggested that palace officials colluded with Anwar.

Then again, politics is the art of deception. That is something for the police to investigate since a report has been lodged. Nonetheless, one would expect the rulers to exercise a degree of due diligence when appointing a prime minister.

### **Ethnic composition**

However, the blogger then chose to tread a dangerous path, delving into the ethnic composition of the present government.

He rubbished the claim that Anwar is leading a “unity government”. Fair enough, it might not be the case in the truest sense of the word.

“As it is now, there is only one Chinese (MP) in the opposition. The others, almost all, close to 99 percent of Chinese MPs are sitting in the Harapan government.

“So what kind of unity government is this? When all the Chinese, except one, join

the government. But the majority of Malays are outside the government... So it is actually a Chinese top-heavy government... So it is not a unity government, it is a polarised government.

“This is not a unity government. It is a racial government. It is a polarised government, which is mostly Chinese and some Malays... This is very dangerous.

“At least in the past, it was balanced in terms of representation. But now, it is not. The Malays are seeing it, they said Harapan is a unity government, but it is actually a Chinese government,” he added in a video, which had close to 290,000 views at the time of writing.

The blogger then recalled how after the May 13 racial riots, the BN was formed to include all parties but DAP chose to remain in the opposition, fearing it would lose Chinese support if it hopped on the bandwagon.

If the Malays and Islam are indeed on the edge of the precipice, then those peddling this claim should be reminded that it was PN chairperson Muhyiddin Yassin and PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang who spurned the king’s suggestion to collaborate with Harapan. The pair also rejected Anwar’s invitation to join him.

So these leaders decided that their lawmakers would be in the opposition.

Instead of following in DAP's footsteps after the 1969 riots, perhaps Muhyiddin and Hadi should have set aside political differences for the greater good, and to unite a polarised nation.

PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang and PN chairperson Muhyiddin Yassin

Furthermore, being part of the government would have allowed them to better safeguard their race and religion from DAP's "nefarious schemes".

After all, joining hands with DAP and Anwar is nothing new for them.

Regardless, the duo have made a decision and it is hoped that PN would serve as an effective opposition to keep Anwar's administration on its toes, and just like how the latter pledged to be a prime minister for all, the opposition should also represent all Malaysians and not restrict its focus to issues about the Malays and Islam.

On the flip side, what if PN formed the government with BN and the others, relegating "almost 99 percent but one" non-Muslim lawmaker to the opposition, wouldn't this have resulted in a polarised administration as well?

Politicians and their mouthpieces seldom look at the big picture, preferring to be shortsighted by design. Being far-sighted would be at the expense of the small picture - their respective political and financial interests.

The blogger also mentioned that the current government would be watched. True, Anwar and his administration would have to walk on eggshells.

But some choose to watch it not because of race and religion but how Harapan proposes to tiptoe around its precarious alliance with those whom it once chastised as corrupted to the core.

Anwar is in an unenviable position.

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