

COMMENT | Obsession over Nurul Izzah's appointment must cease

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“Life is like riding a bicycle, to keep your balance, you must keep moving.” -

Albert Einstein

COMMENT | The excessive attention and obsession over Nurul Izzah Anwar's appointment as senior economics and financial adviser, albeit without pay, detracts from the serious work ahead for her father Anwar Ibrahim as prime minister, complicated by a myriad of serious issues.

It isn't even the worst decision that the PM has made so far in terms of appointments, of which there are a series of very questionable appointments which have not attracted as much attention as these.

Let's look at some examples:

1. There could hardly be a more inappropriate choice of deputy prime minister than Ahmad Zahid Hamidi who still faces 47 corruption-related charges. But this

is acceptable as the price of political expediency and stability.

2. What is the reason for making Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz trade and industry minister through the senatorial route after he lost his contest for a parliamentary seat? He was finance minister before, via the same route.

3. This one is also inexplicable - the appointment of Saifuddin Nasution Ismail as home minister through the senatorial route after he lost his parliamentary seat. Is he so good that he has to be brought into the cabinet by making him a senator? No! One of his first contributions was to defend the indefensible Sosma, the oppressive act that replaced the Internal Security Act during Najib Abdul Razak's time.

4. And how many people have heard of Fadhlina Sidek before she was chosen to be education minister? She was an activist and lawyer who specialised in Islamic family law and child welfare, and she is the daughter of the late Dr Siddiq Fadzil, former president of the Islamic Youth Association of Malaysia (Abim). Now, that should raise eyebrows. The senatorial route could have been used to get a good candidate who understands education and knows the reforms that need to be made.

These are serious errors of judgment, smacking of favouritism and

accommodation which will adversely impact the administration of the government and implementation of policies that will change Malaysia for the better.

They are all far more flawed and damaging, compared to Nurul Izzah's appointment. When the general public so easily accepts the compromise of principles and ethics in the appointment of Zahid and others, it is quite difficult to understand the outpouring of negativity, invective, and charges of nepotism when it comes to her.

Why not?

Is it not conceivable in the cut and thrust of Umno and Malay politics that anyone can become a friend again, even if they stabbed you in the back before and will do the same at the next turn in the road, and anyone can become an enemy even if you were as close as a brother before, that Anwar needs people whom he can trust? Who better to trust than his daughter, Nurul Izzah?

Will Nurul Izzah's unpaid appointment as a senior economic adviser lead to any economic losses for the government? Most certainly not as advice given is free. It is not a position of power because there is no power that she can directly exercise.

Admittedly, there is influence, but there already is much more influence by virtue of Nurul Izzah being Anwar's daughter and one who sees him regularly. That is a role she can't help but one hopes - given her track record one can be hopeful - that she will not abuse that influence.

Why senior economics and financial adviser, why not some other capacity? But one can ask, why not economics and finance? She can be a good conduit of what people's opinions are - ranging from the public to the expert - and convey them to the PM.

She has considerable experience in politics, has a wide range of contacts in and out of government, she is a three-term MP and vice-president of PKR. The last position makes her position as an adviser suitable and will ensure that the thoughts and interests of PKR will be conveyed to the PM, who is also the PKR president.

Even the assertion that this is nepotism is questionable as it has been made clear that no payment will be made and she will have no position of power. The Oxford Dictionary definition of nepotism is: giving unfair advantages to your own family if you are in a position of power, especially by giving them jobs.

It's debatable if you consider it a job when you are not paid and you have no

responsibility. The questions to ask about Nurul Izzah's case are these:

1. Is she likely to make a lot of money from the salary or allowances for the job?
2. Does it confer upon her more power and influence than she already has, which she can abuse for gain?
3. Will she be the only one giving advice?
4. Will it in any way endanger the country?
5. Is her appointment likely to bring benefits and different perspectives?

The answer to the first four questions, most reasonable people will agree, is no. For the last one, most of those who have followed Nurul Izzah and what she has done will agree she will bring some benefit at least, and perhaps even a lot.

'Bad optics'

The problem is the so-called optics of it not sitting too well with the public, who however remained relatively quiet when former prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin appointed allied MPs to positions of power within government-linked

companies and organisations, even when they were not qualified at all.

When then-prime minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob offered convict Najib Abdul Razak the economic adviser's position, the ruckus created seemed less than this.

All considered, Anwar's appointment of his daughter, while it may be a politically insensitive gaffe, is in effect the least of his major mistakes as far as appointments are concerned, of which he has made some.

We should put this behind us, and move forward to more important tasks, such as fighting corruption and fixing the economy. To keep our momentum and balance, we need to simply move forward - if we are stuck in the mud and slime, we will topple over.

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