

Integration with integrity (Pt 6)
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Perak Regent Raja Nazrin Shah has argued for a place under the sun for all Malaysians.

In a recent speech, he said: "Nation-building occurs when society is open, tolerant and forward-looking. Only by being inclusive and participative can the various sectors of our society be productively engaged. It follows that all forms of extremism, chauvinism, racism, and isolationism must be guarded against. They soundly sanctioned, socially, politically, and if necessary, also legally."

But many Malaysians live only in the shadows or in the shade of the Malaysian sun; and especially the two BN members of Parliament who made a sexist remark recently. In the 50th year of our independence, should we not as Malaysians refuse to tolerate uncouth behaviour?" And when this comes from government MPs, how can we continue to entertain a circus of clowns?

What happens to Raja Nazrin's place under the Malaysian sun for abused DAP MP Fong Po Kuan? What happens to the civic culture and decorum of the House if the appointed moderators cannot distinguish between right from wrong on the matter of our common public space and civic culture? There are clear black and white areas of cultural right and wrong; and not just gray ones. And they must be inclusive and not exclusive.

My conclusion is that these BN MPs do not know how to live under the light of a culture of knowledge, openness and transparency; and therefore resort to uncouth and uncivilised behaviour, which even their mothers or sisters would not condone. It is simply unacceptable.

While a student of S H Nasr at George Washington University I once ventured into a reflection regarding light and darkness. I pondered, "is light the absence of darkness or darkness the absence of light?" Continuing my pondering today, I can only conclude that in the case of the two BN MPs, the darkness of their minds and hearts is simply the absence of light of even the knowledge of traditional Malay culture. In traditional Malay parlance the correct words to describe such unacceptable behaviour are kurang ajar.

Tunku Abdul Aziz in his recent column in the New Straits Times accurately wrote: "It is simply too childish and no self-respecting person should allow those infantile words to tumble out of his mouth, no matter how heated an argument or grave the provocation. It is all about self-control, self respect and discipline."

He further wrote: "There is no substitute for decency of thought and deed. Anything else falls short of minimum civilised standards of human behaviour."

Cabinet must answer

To me, these MPs simply demonstrate loutish behaviour.

In fact, two deputy presidents of the National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) representing 126 women's groups spoke up: "The NCWO salutes Fong for making a firm stand on this issue in Parliament. Despite the fact that her call for action was inadmissible on a

technicality, women in our country salute her. Not all is lost. The whole burning question of parliamentarians and their future conduct both in and out of Parliament will now be exposed for greater scrutiny by all citizens who have an onerous duty of electing their MPs. It does become self-evident that all NGOs, other organisations and the population must no longer be bystanders. Citizens must actively participate when action is most necessary."

They went then to call upon the MPs who have tarnished the image of the Parliament to admit and correct their ways, "and apologise both to their fellow MPs as well as to all women".

Women make about 50 per cent of registered voters, so I believe we should take the united voice of the women's organisations (which I believe includes Wanita Umno) seriously. I agree with NCWO that all citizens must act to get rid of such MPs to reinstate the integrity, dignity and honour of Parliament.

Like Tunku Abdul Aziz, my concern is that the BN Whip and Deputy Whip - both from Umno - seem to lack the moral courage to call the spade a spade. In the process, they forget that the constitution gives an equal place under the Malaysian sun to all MPs, whether male or female and whether from Umno or DAP.

The same rules apply to all, so why the double standards? Once elected, every MP speaks as a representative of the people. What is the meaning of democracy in Malaysia when a MP cannot talk about a 'House of Leaks', as the NST headlined it, without her leading and noisy oppositionists from turning a serious issue of uninformed incompetence in governance into a so-called "joke" at the expense of half of humanity?

I find it unacceptable that the cabinet shirked its responsibility to protect the integrity of the Federal Constitution when it ignored the equal place under the sun of the DAP MP and voted in favour of male chauvinist Umno egos to protect their 'face' instead.

Why was this reduced to an Umno issue with a request to the Umno woman minister to deal with it? At a bare minimum, these macho MPs should have been asked to face Wanita Umno head and minister Rafidah Aziz and other Wanita Barisan Nasional MPs. Then let us see if they would have displayed the same behaviour!

We are here dealing with two core issues: the systemic integrity and decorum of conduct in Parliament, and the etiquette of speech within Malaysian culture. This is more than an Umno issue, it is a national issue.

I call on the cabinet to apologise to all Malaysian women and to all MPs in the House of Leaks for the leakage in values and behaviour. It now seems that even the macho MIC minister is of the same kurang ajar calibre. Whither the cabinet and BN Whip on this issue?

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