

Wan Azizah struck at Umno's weak spot
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PKR president Wan Azizah Wan Ismail seemed to have struck at the Achilles heel of Umno when she officially condemned "ketuanan Melayu" (Malay the master race) as the fraudulent ideology that has propped up the party all these years.

Delivering her policy speech during the party's annual congress on Nov 27, she said that the Malay supremacy concept was used by Umno's elites to deceive the Malay masses for self enrichment and maintaining political power.

As a result, the majority of Malays and bumiputra have remained poor and neglected despite 53 years of Umno rule.

selangor pakatan convension 070310 wan azizahCalling on the Malays to discard this ideology, Wan Azizah (right) said: "The concept of Malay supremacy must be left behind so that our children will grow up with the vision of a dignified race."

By any democratic standard, Wan Azizah's clarion call to abandon racism must be applauded as the voice of reason that is in consonance with fundamental values embraced by every member of the world community.

After all, isn't it true that the last country practising institutionalised racism - South Africa - had given up its racist policy twenty years ago?

Though Malaysia has largely escaped the kind of world condemnation accorded former apartheid South Africa, thanks to the BN government's skilful image polishing, nevertheless, endemic racism remains a plague that has sabotaged national integration and thwarted economic growth.

'Ketuanan Melayu' indefensible

Perhaps aware that "ketuanan Melayu" is indefensible in the eyes of the world, Umno was at a loss as to how to respond to Wan Azizah's unexpected frontal assault.

To keep silent would be to acquiesce to Wan Azizah's assertion and that would spell trouble - big trouble. For it is through inciting the primordial instinct of race that Umno hopes to scrape through the coming national election. So, how could Umno give up "ketuanan Melayu"?

On the other hand, to defend the ideology would be to invite worldwide ridicule and condemnation. And that would not be pretty, keeping in mind that with the myriad of modern communication gadgets instantly transmitting news and messages, international backlash could be swift and unpalatable.

So, after a short interval to recover from Wan Azizah's surprise initiative, responses began to drip in from Umno's top leaders, but these are either evasive or irrelevant, and none has dared to take Wan Azizah head on.

NONE Deputy Umno president and Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin (left) described Wan Azizah's assertion as an attempt "to salvage a sinking ship", and to regain public support after a divisive party election. What about the ketuanan issue? Not a word of rebuttal.

Umno vice-president and Defence Minister Zahid Hamidi said Wan Azizah was "only trying to divert public attention from the party's serious problems." He said PKR wanted to please the Chinese and Indians to gain their support for the next general election. Again, he avoided touching on the ketuanan issue.

Not unexpectedly, the dirty job of savage counter-offensive was left to Umno's ultra racist wing Perkasa. Its youth leader Arman Azha Abu Hanifah attacked Wan Azizah as a "political prostitute".

He said that she and other PKR Malay leaders owed their professional achievement to the "ketuanan Melayu" policy and that they had now betrayed the race for the sake of gaining Chinese and Indian support.

Interestingly, Arman's bad manners and insensitive blast at other Malay leaders seem to justify Azizah's advocacy to abandon the "ketuanan" mentality so as to regain dignity for the race.

It is not only abhorrent conduct to call a respected national leader "prostitute", but his inference that Malays are not capable of achieving success unless they are propped up by racial favouritism is outright humiliating to the race.

In fact, Arman's crass outburst has unwittingly made him the best poster boy of the ill fruits that "ketuanan Melayu" has borne.

NONE However, the icing on the cake in this episode is undoubtedly the novel theory put up by the vociferous Umno cabinet member Nazri Aziz (right) to deflect Wan Azizah's criticism.

He said "ketuanan Melayu" is not about the Malay race, but about Malay Sultans. He said the word was coined to protect the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers, not to emphasise racial supremacy.

Glaring evidence of racism

While Nazri may consider himself ingenious in coming out with this new interpretation to escape the "ketuanan" trap, it sure holds no water. The bedrock of Umno's hegemony is its racial ideology which has captivated its core supporters, and "ketuanan Melayu" has been coined to symbolise Malay supremacy.

It is through the indoctrination and implementation of this ideology that Umno has been able to win election after election; and Umno is not about to give it up for whatever reason.

That Umno has practised pervasive racism is manifested in the gradual and progressive Malay-nisation of the entire government machinery since the 1969 racial riots until it has become an almost mono-racial entity.

This applies to our civil service, army, police, judiciary, attorney general's chamber, election commission, anti-corruption commission, various statutory bodies and even government linked corporations.

These publicly funded employees are not only almost entirely Malays, but are indoctrinated to be loyal to Umno while remaining hostile to its political adversaries who include Malays.

If Nazri insists he is right, he can put his interpretation to the test by asking his Umno cabinet colleagues whether they agree that "ketuanan Melayu" is not about Malay dominance or Malay power but about Malay Sultans. I bet none will agree.

If Umno denies that it has embraced the racist "ketuanan Melayu" as its core ideology, it should explain its persistent racist conduct and answer some questions such as the following:

* When Selangor Mentri Besar Khalid Ibrahim proposed that the mono-race Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) open up 10% of its student admission to non-bumiputra and foreign students, why did top Umno leaders including then minister of higher education Khaled Nordin condemn Khalid Ibrahim as a "traitor selling out Malay special privileges"?

* When Selangor state-owned PKNS' (Selangor Development Corporation) general manager retired in late 2008, Khalid Ibrahim wanted to appoint deputy general manager Wong Siew Moi as acting general manager. Why did Umno and PKNS staff protest against the appointment on the ground of her ethnicity, if Umno was not racist?; and,

* When the Perak state government under Pakatan Rakyat during its reign in 2008 wanted to grant land titles to have-nots of all races who had long occupied the land (majority being Malays), why did Umno leaders criticize the move to grant land titles to non-Malays as betrayal of Malay interests?

Political observers should have no difficulty in discerning Umno's racist ideology and policy as the root cause of the political, social and economic ills that have caused the country to slip badly against its regional neighbours. However, it still takes great political courage for a political party like PKR to take the bold step of calling a spade a spade and unmask Umno's racist bluff.

For such a move is fraught with the risk of alienating the largest electoral pool - the Malays - as Umno is bound to unleash the country's mass media, which is entirely under its thumb, to inflict maximum vilification of PKR's honest intention to salvage the country. For that, all patriotic Malaysians must not only commend Wan Azizah for her gallantry but must also give her their whole-hearted support to enable her to fulfill her noble mission.

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