

Why do terrible MPs get elected?

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The recent 'bocor' statement by the Kinabatangan and Jasin MPs understandably caused an uproar. Indeed, it was silly for certain quarters in the government to argue that the opposition was trying to gain political mileage by playing up the issue. This begs the question: why were the eminent MPs, with the honorary 'Yang Berhormat' tag attached to their names, willing to utter such a despicable and degrading statement in the first place?

There has been much talk now of ensuring that the two notorious MPs would get defeated in the next general election. But before too many of us get excited, let me say this: chances are they will be returned in the next election.

I'm not merely talking about phantom votes or the money, media and the built-in machinery advantage of the BN. Even taking out those elements from the equation, I won't be surprised if these sorts of candidates will continue to win. I'm sure many among the chattering classes would ask: why do terrible MPs get elected?

This is a question many of us on this side of the digital and class divide would ask. You probably read it from a blog immediately after it happened. You probably saw the YouTube clip detailing the thing. Being educated, you have been taught that there are certain boundaries of political correctness you should adhere to, at the very least in public (not to mention the august Parliamentary chamber!)

Yet many, many Malaysians are still on the other side of the divide. They do not possess the same information you have. Their main source of information would still be the vernacular press, radio and television. They've been taught that this sums up what the opposition is all about: make a lot of noise but nothing else. Furthermore, they have more basic and bigger questions - unemployment, the higher cost of living, crime, social ills, lack of development etc. Like it or not, personality also counts. A sexist and racist MP may be voted merely because he knows how to hang out with the villagers in the local stalls, wearing a 'kain pelikat' and a singlet to boot.

It is entirely correct to criticise the two MPs for their insulting behaviour but those who do must also understand the political realities of their constituencies that allow these personalities to be YBs. We should educate Malaysians on why making sexist or racist remarks is wrong, but we should also strive to understand why, for a lot of people, these things matter less than bread and butter issues. We should get more Malaysians to have higher expectations of their MPs, but we should also try to figure out why many Malaysians are easily contented by their politicians. We should campaign for the removal of these two MPs, yet we should also register to vote to make our voices count.

There needs to be greater interaction across the divide. The chattering classes must essentially do more than just chatter and go down to the ground, educate and empower the men and women in the 'kampung' the New Villages and the estates. At the same time, they should also understand the realities for many Malaysians living and working in those places. It's good to condemn these things in the 'mamak' stall or in your blog; but it would be better if you could either participate in the political process or at the very least in NGOs that strive to make Malaysia better.

Or we can choose to criticise these MPs from the comfort of chic cafes; to complain about the level of our politics without getting involved, to even migrate at the disappointment with the state of our country. But this means that terrible MPs will continue to get elected. And for the millions of ordinary Malaysians living in less comfortable environments - without the choice of leaving the country - they will have these terrible MPs to represent them, speak in their names and then legislate laws that stifle the development of the country.

Some tell me that there's little hope left in the country. That's only because we choose for it to be so. The future of the country, by the grace of God, is the sum of all of our individual choices and actions. If we choose to not just talk, but work towards that, I am sure this blessed land of ours will have a bright and prosperous future.

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