

**Fools in a dangerous slumber**  
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There's an old saying - "Victory has a thousand fathers, and defeat is an orphan". If this is anything to go by, then on March 9, 2008, scores of Malaysians would have an adopted son named Anwar Ibrahim. But don't count me in.  
MCPX

I have neither love nor loathing for the man. He is what he is, and of late, he's been trying to shake off what he was - an Umno poster boy.

In this game called politics, people apparently change. A Malay nationalist can become an egalitarian superhero. Rural Islamists speak of multi-religious tolerance. Most dramatic of all, Umno cocoons suddenly express a Friedman-like grasp of global business.

To be certain, they all succeed in various degrees to change very little of themselves and even less of the people they (sometimes) represent. Yes, our leaders have not changed, and neither have we. Honestly, how can we expect better leaders when we are no better?

And as tradition has it, the masses are always fooled, sometimes even fooling me into believing that they want to be fooled - what's new!

### **Sheep mentality**

We are fools for choosing bad leaders and then comforting ourselves that we have little choice in the matter - as if that really makes up for the lack of faith. Not just content with runaway idiocy, we assert that an inept prime minister is the cause of all our woes. In so doing, we behave exactly how contemptuous politicians treat us - like sheep.

Then, in an exaggerated sense of bravado post-March 8, we convince ourselves that he has to go. Like the jilted lover out for blood, we are enraged to remove him from office (a castration of sorts), not that it will make things better, but to avenge the hurt caused by his lies and empty promises.

All this while shades of Kafka's Trial dance in my head, reminding me that the times may have changed but the human condition persists.

No one factor, in this case Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, can be solely responsible for a country's malaise. There are always permutations and combinations at play - you don't have to major in mathematics to know this. But the laziness of the mind, in its vain attempts at simplification, is popular operandi - the so called voice of the people.

So from all corners, the satay peddler in Kajang, the Ipoh-born insurance girl, to the incredibly useless socialite, from cronies without 'projects' to the chauvinist Melayu Baru - they are all singing the same song.

"He's a real Nowhere Man, sitting in his Nowhere Land, making all his Nowhere Plans for Nobody"... Tis a catchy tune, but even Lennon would not have meant this for our embattled PM. From where I'm sitting, it's a swan song burlesque.

## **Real enemy lies within**

For what it's worth, we should accept some blame for the system of mis-governance that we have in Malaysia. It is as much our failing that Badawi has been in deep slumber.

After all, our leaders are a reflection of who we are, what we are and what we want to become. It seems to me that the question is not so much which leader best reflects us but what must be in place and institutionalised, to produce the leaders we desire.

Should we then be surprised when foreigners look at us and say, "Ah, but you don't want a good government?"

At best, the current pre-occupation with his removal is fire-fighting. If it succeeds, it will just be another downfall of a fat cat in a top hat. Preventing bad leaders from entering the ring and the art of decision-making still lay amiss.

Make no mistake Malaysia, the enemy eludes us. For it is not Abdullah or Anwar nor Mahathir - the real enemy lies within. Call it money politics, call it patronage, and call it feudalism if you like. But if we really have the guts to admit it, let's call it our weakness too.

The only devils that we have to be afraid of are the ones inside each of us - to borrow words from the Mahatma.

Since Parliament's first sitting, only politicians from the right parties with an obscene war chest have climbed the ranks, in the process, coupling it with one predictable result for this society - mediocrity!

## **Running dogs without merit**

C'mon .... Can we produce good a government with fools at the helm, people whom by a long shot don't deserve to be there? Yes, I'm talking about ministers, GLC heads and senior civil servants who make Homer Simpson look talented and the CIA look honest.

Transparency, democracy, human rights and press freedom are not just western constructs - they are essential to all human progress. It only seems that way because the West has exhausted more of the opposite than we have.

Lets not talk about their atrocities - they know what they have done. And it would be foolish for us to go down the same path of waste, inequity and injustice under the guise that we, as Asians have different values.

Do we deserve to be mediocre? Fifty years of nation-building says "Yes". In zero-tolerance Singapore, most of our BN leaders would be behind bars. They have no Amin Shah's and Halim Saad's in the making, no spillovers of the evil marriage that is business and politics.

In Malaysia, we condone political parties to operate monopolistic companies for heaven's sake! That's like being FIFA president, referee and bookmaker all at once. Fools that we are.

It took our southern neighbour 20 years to 'clean up' largely through strong will and a permutation of well-conceived ideas. We may take longer. But we haven't even started.

Not when the biggest corporate/political criminals are walking free - what a blemish on the ACA, SC, and Police Force.

### **Communal harmony or messy progress?**

Here's a tip. Redefine corruption such that prosecutors only need to prove that a person is living beyond his means without having to find evidence of dirty money.

Seriously now, what kind of governance should we have for a better Malaysia? This is not for me to answer alone. But it would help if we get some of our brightest minds together.

And the arguments may be as old as Patpong showgirls. I hear that we need strong leadership, of an authoritarian kind - Dr M and his nemesis Harry Lee are sure to gloat over this! Others say we need greater participation of the citizenry - but do we really want to participate?

Don't Asians value stability and communal harmony over messy progress? Unless we get it right, both in execution and spirit, we have not achieved honour in country, race and religion.

If I had my way, Robert Kennedy would be PM of Malaysia - for here is a man whose ways and means I admire. Albeit American, to be precise Irish American of the Catholic kind, and from a different era, he still can belong to all of us and lives within you and me. Such is the ability of the human spirit to gravitate to what is true and good.

O' Malaysia, its time we stop being fools!

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