

Is Anwar only about petrol price?
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As we are all watching the news anxiously during the campaigning for the Permatang Pauh by-election, I am thinking: is it really for the oil price?
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I believe Malaysians will cast their votes for Anwar Ibrahim not merely because he promised them that the price of petrol will go down if Pakatan Rakyat can form the federal government.

Firstly, the reduction of the petrol price is an act which has a far deeper meaning. It tells of a government whose economic policy is driven by the concern for the welfare of the rakyat at all levels. There is a sense that this new Pakatan government will be compassionate and not just capitalistic.

Malaysians are tired of the kind of economic policies which reinvest the country's profit (such as the profits from Petronas) into white elephant mega-structures and meaningless mega-projects which eventually turn out to be millions (or billions!) of the rakyat's money going down the drain, or happily into cronies' bank accounts.

We are looking for economic policies which work for the man on the street, for the folks in the kampung. And Anwar's offer came down to the pakcik and makcik as a promise to put the people before profit. This is the real NEP, the real deal where affirmative actions really benefit the hardcore poor, not well-connected Datuk.

Secondly, we know that a compassionate government is also a government concerned with justice for all. The Barisan Nasional government was notorious for its incompetency and anti-democratic stance in its fifty years of running this country, including single-handedly destroying the independence of our judiciary, failing to tackle the rampant corruption and cronyism, and the stubborn refusal to discard colonial draconian laws such as the Internal Security Act which denies the just process of the law to those charged under it.

A number of the key leaders of the Pakatan Rakyat government have in one way or another experienced the cruelty of the Barisan Nasional hegemony, including Anwar himself who was allegedly a victim of political conspiracy maneuvered through the police and judiciary of our country.

Not only does the majority of the rakyat sympathise with Anwar, but we are willing to believe his word when he said that prison has changed the man. We trust that like the great Nelson Mandela of South Africa, having suffered the injustice done to him, Anwar and Pakatan Rakyat will rectify the injustice we have experienced and they will turn out to be better administrators of the country than Barisan Nasional.

Thirdly, I think to many people, Anwar represents an audacious hope, to borrow a phrase from another highly-charged political campaign, to all Malaysians. We were destined to be a people, born to be a nation, together. But the communal and racist political strategies of the ruling party over the course of half-a-century have effectively distorted the destiny of the nation. We have all become victims of the divide and conquer policy of Barisan Nasional, inherited from their colonial masters.

But Anwar, like the noble Dato' Onn Jaafar, almost half a century before him, now offers another chance to Malaysia to realise her destiny. When Arif Shah was announced to be the candidate for Barisan Nasional in the Permatang Pauh by-election, I immediately recalled his challenge to Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng in the last Penang state assembly sitting.

He requested the CM, as a Chinese, to help the Chinese in his (Arif's) constituency. That is the kind of politics we are all sick of. Umno has portrayed themselves as the exclusive heroes of the Malay community, MCA, the Chinese and MIC the Indians.

As long as there is a racial element in the tag of our political parties, we will always come back a full circle to the sort of politics which say that only the Malays can help the Malays, only the Chinese can help the Chinese and only the Indians can help the Indians. But the Pakatan Rakyat, of which Anwar is the most formidable symbol, promises to rise beyond that sort of politics.

In the Penang state assembly episode above, Lim Guan Eng refused to play into Arif Shah's racist hands and responded that the state government will be colour blind when it comes to caring for the rakyat. This is what Malaysians are waiting for, when we the Rakyat will be judged not by the colour of our skin but by our common identity as Malaysians.

We may not have expected the political tsunami of March 8, but now many of us realise that for the first time that, change is possible. And we know that it may be another half-a-century before a figure like Anwar will rise again if we miss the boat this time around.

It is therefore not merely for a lower oil price that we will vote for Anwar. We are voting for all that Anwar and the Pakatan Rakyat represent and have promised to deliver - the dream of a compassionate, just and united Malaysia.

Of course, at the end of the day, if the price of petrol falls, that will be a great bonus for everyone!

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