

**Radical change will do Malaysia good**  
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I disagree with the statement that "Crossover politics undermine politics of principles."

What politics of principles? As far as we know, every single principle in politics has been broken in the country. Even Dr Mahathir's brilliant ideals for the government being 'clean, efficient and trustworthy' resulted in the opposite. And now he has the nerve to damn the present administration as a "rotten government" and the country a "police state."

When did politicians uphold those imaginary principles? Chandra Muzaffar himself is a good example that politicians can change their minds and be allowed to re-invent themselves and take part in crossovers and play devil's advocate against their former party. He was a key political leader of PKR but has since left and has become a strong critic of his former party, especially its leader.

Ezam Mohd Nor is another example, and a multiple one at that, though not an elected politician. It would be undemocratic to hold them to ransom and force them not to criticise or work against their former party and comrades because of a faulty understanding of the freedom of choice in politics.

Politicians and political parties are known to change sides. This is quite normal. You see it occurring in many countries. Sometimes when there is a hung parliament, the minority parties or independent politicians hold the balance of power. They are then courted by the major parties and are known to change sides to get their way.

Chandra wrote, "There is no guarantee that once the crossovers are accomplished, the new government will be able to concentrate on the people's well-being". This begs the question, does the mode of getting into government by open elections give the same guarantee?

Of course not. Otherwise Chandra himself would not have been a strong critic of the incumbent administration as a PKR leader then. There is no guarantee that politicians will do what they promise and that is why there are elections every five years for voters to bring them to account. If Pakatan Rakyat does not perform, it will face the same hostility and vote of no confidence and I am sure Anwar Ibrahim knows that.

Chandra further wrote, "The deposed, supported by powerful vested interests built over decades, will certainly hit back. The resulting tussle for power could lead to continuous political instability and even chaos. At a time when the economic woes facing Malaysia and other countries are getting worse, political instability can only increase the people's suffering."

In his presumption of retaliation, I agree. The status quo will not give up power and privilege willingly and will retaliate but what has that to do with crossovers? Do we honestly think there will be no retaliation even if the powers that be lose fair and square in an open general election? Experience does not back it. The stakes are high but Malaysia can't risk being held to ransom just because change will bring political instability.

No concerned Malaysian observes current events without some reminder of May 13, and all the more reason they should not be afraid because to capitulate to the threats of the

unprincipled would be to enslave oneself all over again. Anyway this is 2008 and conditions were different then. Today, the conflict is not between races where the battle lines are drawn along ethnic divides but purely political.

The tussle between Pakatan and BN is as much a struggle of Malay leadership as much as a choice between good and bad governance, though one side has yet to prove itself and the other has proven it can't deliver, and is bogged down with corruption, incompetence and infighting.

Malaysians are resilient and industrious and no strangers to economic woes. They have weathered many economic storms and will continue to face many economic hardships and overcome the adversities. But they are unwilling to allow the country to slip further into social anarchy and for corruption to fester. Living in a police state is not what the founding fathers promised.

The suggestion that Pakatan merely form a shadow cabinet is sheer naivete that a textbook novice may follow. In the rough and tumble world of realpolitik, the sooner it gets into government the better because one never knows what other conspiracies could be planned. The desperate will try to win by hook or by crook. We have seen it happen in Myanmar and recently Zimbabwe where the winners were denied their right to form government.

Furthermore, the political conditions are such that many parties in BN may have reached their limits of tolerance. The erosion of their political capital is blamed on the domineering ways of their senior partner and some are desperate to make that vital move. Anwar offers that opportunity for them to regain the lost support and freedom to do what they could not under the current leadership.

The other option is for the current government to suddenly make radical reforms to regain the people's support but that is a bit too late for many Malaysians. All that malpractices by certain government leaders have left a bitter taste and many Malaysians want a total change of leadership, not a political makeover.

When there is a blitz on corruption, it is always the fall guys and the foot soldiers who take the rap. The big fish still carry on business as usual and swim through the dragnets with such big holes to make the war on corruption seem like a virtual-reality game. The public is not as stupid as the politicians think. Only this time there is the real prospect of a change of administration that for the first time since Merdeka, promises real freedom and puts nationhood on the agenda again.

BN has only itself to blame. In 2004, the people gave PM Abdullah Ahmad Badawi a whopping mandate. But he blew it. Corruption and scandals and incompetence, perhaps even negligent behaviour have been its undoing. For example, Abdullah gave the PGCC a thumbs-up and much publicity but now we are told it wasn't even approved by the local council and state government. How irresponsible can one get? Is this principled politics?

The days of presumptuous and careless behaviour by those in power must come to an end, whoever is in charge. The mood of the people is for better governance. The Internet will ensure no government can act like a law unto itself. A globalised world means corrupt leaders will be held to account because they can't hide their dark secrets abroad anymore. So it was necessary to take bloggers out of the picture but it won't work. The government will only make more enemies.

The public is not disturbed by the alarmist criticisms of Anwar Ibrahim by Chandra, Ezam

and the others. Why should they? Even if Anwar fails them like those he tries to replace, what have they got to lose? At least Anwar gets some justice for the bad way they treated him. So much for the politics of principles of his enemies, more like the politics of the principals.

But for the sake of credibility, those who make crossovers must have good reason. As long as they continue to serve their electorates, and some may do it better by changing sides, it is a win-win result. Voting for politicians is risky business and always a gamble. Malaysians may be more prepared to place their bets on Pakatan because they offer better odds.

Let's hope Pakatan will open its doors to every politician who wants to do a better job that they could not while their hands were tied and mouths gagged. In business, we want healthy competition so that consumers will benefit. In politics, healthy choices of government can only be good for citizens and is long overdue.

Crossovers or not, the nature of politics is such that politicians will only act on principles when they are men and women of principles and act on convictions that are consistent with the nation's interests. It has nothing to do with how they get into power.

We expect our politicians to be men and women of sound character. Governments that do not perform and serve the people well deserve to be kicked out of office every now and then. Let us hope there will be radical change to show us that they mean business.

For a start, the one that rids the nation of all those draconian laws such as the ISA, media licensing, official secrets and other spurious laws used more as political weapons of torture than protecting the country's internal security, gets my vote. And the one that quashes the case against Irene Fernandez and Raja Petra gets my support because they are true patriots who do not deserve to be victimised.

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