

**There is Ahmad Ismail in each of us**  
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**Josh Hong**

Like it or not, the racist remarks by Ahmad Ismail, the Bukit Bendera Umno division chief, have their silver lining.

That Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak was compelled to "apologise" over the issue only indicated that the Malay party was now at its lowest ebb in history.

Without the shocking results of the March 8 general election and the rippling effects of Permatang Pauh, one wondered if the once arrogantly powerful Umno would be forced to eat the humble pie.

On the other hand, PKR must not forget it too has rotten apples in its fold, and much of the public is still waiting to see what disciplinary action would be taken against Zulkifli Noodin, the errant MP who barged into the hall and disrupted a Bar Council forum on ramifications of religious conversion last month.

Some DAP leaders have also called for the government to charge Ahmad Ismail under the Sedition Act. Yes, the party that has been chastising the BN for keeping draconian laws in place is now finding them useful, which is rather bizarre to say the least.

But are Chinese Malaysians really troubled by Ahmad Ismail's bluntness? Hardly. Lest we forget, this is a community that has been putting up with all sorts of racist slurs over the years and, seriously, the recent controversy is not the worst of its kind.

Najib, Hishammuddin Hussein and Khairy Jamaluddin have all said and done things that hurt the non-Malay communities deeply in the past, and they are yet to convince us the leopard is now ready to change its spots.

As one looked back, it would in fact be unfair to blame solely Umno for the race war that flares up time and time again. Gerakan, the self-styled conscience of the Barisan Nasional, has long given up on its political ideology and multiracial outlook.

During Lim Keng Yeik's presidency, the party did nothing but kowtow to Umno in exchange of the parochial rule in Penang, while dissenting voices were suppressed.

Meanwhile, Dr Ling Liong Sik as MCA president once urged the Chinese to "behave as a minority group", and his "wise" advice was acted upon after Ong Ka Ting assumed the leadership.

Under Ong, the MCA increasingly resorted to "fighting within the system" instead of "making noises in public", which only served to strengthen the misconception that Chinese Malaysians were only interested in securing business interests and some government posts.

The various Chinese associations and newspapers that were willingly co-opted by the MCA, too, should bear a huge chunk of responsibility for the erosion of civil rights within the community.

**The new political realities**

Now that the 12th general election have offered the country a viable alternative to the BN, I can see many Chinese Malaysians are no longer pinning their hope on the MCA or the Gerakan to "check and balance" against Umno.

Either of the parties has simply been proven to be too emasculated to do the job, and much of the Chinese community now turns to Pakatan Rakyat for a new dawn.

In spite of all the smear campaign by the BN, not to mention the strangest coincidence of the corruption charges against PR assemblymen in Perak, about 78 percent of the Chinese votes were cast for Anwar Ibrahim in Permatang Pauh, while up to 85 percent of those present at a forum at the KL-Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall last Wednesday made clear that they looked favourably at a potential change of national government sooner rather than later.

Political analysts and scholars can argue over the ethical aspect of crossover till the cow comes home, but the people can tolerate the race-based structure imposed by the BN no more.

Unfortunately, the political realities after March 8 have failed to dawn on some MCA leaders.

For instance, Chew Mei Fun, the Wanita MCA deputy chief, once attempted to "correct" a detractor by reminding the latter that he would have been living in China if not for the MCA's effort to campaign for Malayan citizenship on behalf of the Chinese.

What Chew did not realise was that it is the presence of the Chinese in Malaysia that warranted the existence of the MCA.

Had all Chinese and Indian Malaysians "returned" to their ancestors' lands, there would be no need for the MCA and the MIC in the first place, and Umno's dream of a purely Malay state would most probably have come true.

Donald Lim Siang Chai, an MCA vice-president, is no better. At the Wednesday forum, Lim reportedly averred that Chinese as a second largest ethnic group would usually be able to receive "a lot of goodies" and live "a good life" in countries where the largest ethnic groups are "lackadaisical".

In other words, Lim still believed because the Malays are "lazy", the Chinese should be able to stand to benefit from it if they "fight properly". I am indeed surprised and worried no one in the hall actually stood up and refuted his racist mindset.

### **Let Umno handle this**

Race is a mutually reinforcing concept. While many non-Malays are happy to shout aloud their being marginalised in this country, they are least prepared to face up to their racist self too.

A quick look at how Malaysians in general treat the asylum-seekers and foreign workers on our soil and you know what I mean.

Without dismantling this ugly side of us and the awkward hierarchies of ethnicity, class and culture, the country will never be able to construct an inclusive sense of identity based on

the notion of where one is rather than where one's forefathers were from.

Ahmad Ismail has received enough umbrage of criticisms by now. Just let his party handle him while we sit down for a while and examine the racist self inside of us, shall we?

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