

Obama : American dream, Malaysian nightmare?
Malaysiakini.com
Oct 7, 2008
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When Rosa Park, a black lady in Alabama, refused to give up her seat to make way for a white passenger in Dec 1955, little did she know her simple disobedience would spark seismic change in American society.

Park's courageous and principled stand prompted Martin Luther King Jr into action, as he launched and led the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

It all culminated in King's world-famous 'I Have a Dream' speech in 1963.

The most revered son of the 'Civil Rights Movement' did not live long enough to taste the fruit of his righteous effort. Brutally assassinated in 1968, his death has not been in vain.

As Barack Obama delivered his victory speech, on the TV screen Jesse Jackson, Oprah Winfrey and even Condoleezza Rice – a Republican – were all in tears.

Human life is indeed imbued with paradoxes and potentialities. When King led hundreds of thousands of Americans to march for jobs and freedom in 1963, it was also the year when George Wallace, then Governor of Alabama, declared:

"In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

And the segregationist policy was only ended in its entirety in 1968, the year when the United States showed off its technological advancement over the Soviet Union by sending three men to orbit the moon.

The 1960s were the decade of great political awakening for the Americans, who clearly understood the country would not move forward as a united nation so long as racism remained officially sanctioned.

It might be able to make even greater progress in science and technology, but its humanistic values of freedom and democracy would only ring hollow if Blacks were not given the opportunity to fully realise their potentials.

George W. Bush 01Time and time again, the Americans have demonstrated their ability to reflect and opt for a different course. Obama's victory is also a strong verdict on the outgoing President Bush and his administration.

Absence of ketuanan Putih

While Malaysians of various ethnic origins laud Obama's ascension to presidency, one must not overlook the fact that the US, despite its dark record of racism and slavery in the past, is still an immigrant country that is multiracial in nature.

The so-called founding fathers may be white, but there is no longer any official ideology –

be it by the Republicans or the Democrats – that approves of white supremacy.

A crucial factor behind Obama's win lies in the absence of a Ketuanan Putih (White Supremacy).

Which is not the case with Malaysia, where the racist idea of Ketuanan Melayu – the raison d'être of Umno - is still alive and kicking.

anwar hari raya open house kuala lumpur 121008 zaid ibrahim Just recently, Zaid Ibrahim, a successful Malay lawyer and a top philanthropist in the country, was severely chastised by Umno bigots for his valour to state that the racist ideology had failed to uplift the Malay community.

Having turned its gun against BN component parties for raising the 'sensitive' issue, Umno is now ready to combat any maverick in its rank who dares to question.

Although the nation was shocked at BN's losses in the general elections early this year, Malaysians were willing to give the untested coalition of PAS, DAP and PKR a chance to administer several states.

Eight months on, the euphoria has evaporated, thanks to the bickering within the uneasy Pakatan Rakyat.

In Kedah, the PAS government remains firm on its newly introduced policy of having a 50% bumiputra quota in housing schemes. Compelling developers to provide affordable houses in any development is, in my understanding, a welcome measure that encourages distributive justice.

house low cost housing 200307 type 03 However, implementing it through a colour lens will only result in more wastage and incur additional costs. I need not go further in articulating this as examples are abound all over Malaysia.

Why not conduct a detailed survey on the poverty level in Kedah and formulate housing policy accordingly? It will certainly benefit the real low-income group - the majority of whom are Malays – without actually penalising both the developers and the needy non-Malays.

Even if Azizan Abdul Razak, the Mentri Besar, intends to help other disadvantaged groups in Kedah, such rhetoric only generates more ethnic mistrust.

To make things worse, PAS' national leaders have come up with statements that resemble those of Umno.

PAS Selangor's objection

Hadi Awang, PAS president, has said that he would play no part in a federal government led by the Pakatan should Malay members of parliament be in the minority.

It would seem that, while the party is holding Islam as its forte, its Malayness is increasingly visible.

Meanwhile, Dr Hassan Ali, PAS Selangor chief and a former vice-president, made clear his objection to Low Siew Mui's appointment as the acting general manager of Perbadanan

Kemajuan Negeri Selangor (PKNS) for fear that she would not be able to represent the Muslim civil servants.

Mind boggling, to say the least. Going by Dr. Hassan's logic, I, a Chinese Christian residing in Petaling Jaya, would have every right to protest against Khalid Ibrahim as Selangor Menteri Besar merely on account of his Islamic faith!

I did not because I trusted Khalid more than Khir Toyo, the man who had vowed to eliminate the opposition in the state assembly.

But it is even more disappointing when Khalid himself caved in to PAS by assuring that the successor to the PKNS post would be a Malay.

If a non-Malay, be it Chinese, Indian or others, is not qualified to head a state agency because of skin colour, how much faith can one have in the allegedly multiracial approach of the Pakatan?

Not to be outdone by the rest, Salahuddin Ayub, PAS Youth Chief, totally disregarded the consensus of the Pakatan when he said adamantly that the 30% Malay equity must be maintained and defended "even if the target has been reached".

In other words, special quotas and stipulations have come to symbolise the "sacrosanct" status of the Malays in Malaysia, and they – as the embodiment of Ketuanan Melayu – must be carried out at all costs even if their existence is no longer viable or justifiable.

It is time to tell the Pakatan leaders, especially those of PAS and PKR, in their face that the honeymoon is over and hunting against Umno on a race-based platform will only send the country into greater disarray, especially in the wake of the impending economic crisis.

Our own Obama

Be so as it may, it is not a must for Malaysians to elect a non-Malay leader. For me, whether or not Malaysia would one day produce our own Obama is not an issue, but the country must be led by leaders who are clean, upright, forward-looking and capable, best suited to handle the challenges ahead.

Not someone like Najib Abdul Razak who is too tainted to be entrusted with the nation's future.

On the other hand, non-Malays must adopt an inclusive language to articulate their political aspirations, much as Obama has done to win the support of white voters.

After all, the Malays still perceive themselves to be economically weak, not unlike the Blacks in the US. It is vitally important for all Malaysians to debate and discuss the issue of poverty and distribution of wealth without racial bias.

Jesse Jackson, too, contested for Democratic presidential candidacy in 1988. He failed because of his Get-Our-Own-Back stance that alienated the whites and unnerved other ethnic minorities. His message was too vengeful to be comfortable with much of the party's rank and file.

On the contrary, Obama emphasised very little on race, but highlighted hope and

reconciliation, making his post-racial, post-segregationist image more in tune with the desires of much of the American electorate today.

In Malaysia, many have given up on Umno to effect change. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi sounded generous when he said what happened in the US could happen in Malaysia too if it was the people's choice.

But he knows full well with the idea of Ketuanan Melayu intact, any progress made by a non-Malay politically would be interpreted as a threat to the nation. It is he and his cohorts who see the American Dream as a Malaysian Nightmare.

So many have placed their trust in those like Anwar Ibrahim, Zulkefly Ahmad, Husam Musa, Khalid Ibrahim, Kamaruddin Jaafar and even Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the tok guru of PAS, for hopes and inspirations.

However, if these Malay-led parties only turn out to be no different from Umno, without a third choice, the people will no doubt court the devil that they know come next election.

That would put paid to a Malaysian vision.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/92649>