

**Anwar can make a good PM : Ramon
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"Anwar Ibrahim can be a good prime minister"

This statement did not come from an opposition supporter or an Anwar sycophant - it came from a senior citizen, a respected former senior civil servant, a non-politician and a man who loves and cares for his country.

It carries more credibility when the man who said it knows Anwar personally and had worked with the opposition leader previously when they were in government.

ramon navaratnam interview 071108 05Ramon Navaratnam, president of Transparency International Malaysia, tells why he thinks Anwar is a good candidate on Mkini tv's 'Uncensored' talk show yesterday.

"Anwar is able, talented and charismatic and possesses the necessary training and experience to take up the post.

"He was a very good finance minister, there were problems with Mahathir (former prime minister) as he had a different approach, different philosophy, and genuine differences on how to handle the 1997 crisis," he told talk show host Francis Paul Siah.

Ramon should know the workings in the Finance Ministry as he spent more than 20 years there and had also served as the ministry's deputy secretary-general.

He also said that Anwar was able to spread his message that he was the standard bearer for reforms in the country.

"I think Anwar is a good candidate and in this matter the people must decide. If there is more freedom, I think you will find that there will a tough fight," said Ramon.

Asked for his thoughts of Pakatan Rakyat so far, the 73-year-old anti-graft crusader said the Pakatan coalition led by Anwar might be less corrupt in comparison to Barisan Nasional as it is a newly formed alliance.

"I may be bias. But corruption is such a great evil ... the party that is new is less corrupt.

"Umno, MCA and MIC have a tradition and perception that they have been significantly corrupt. Pakatan is new and we can't be sure ... but so far it appears to be cleaner and they don't have the money anyway for money politics.

The audacious Ramon Navaratnam, having commended the opposition leader, also described Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak as an equally good choice to be prime minister.

"I have known Najib since he was a young man, he was in the civil service for a little while and I have worked under his father and I have a lot of respect for that family.

"I think he is capable, he is able, he has got talent, he has got grooming and the right

background but unfortunately in recent years, rightly or wrongly, he has been under a cloud.

"So although he (Najib) has the ability and potential to be a great leader the perception of him being involved in difficult circumstances that may inhibit him or might upset people's perception of his capabilities and capacity to lead effectively," said Ramon.

He acknowledged that if Najib is able to resolve all those lingering doubts "he would be able to provide good strong leadership".

Asked to compare whether Anwar or Najib would make a better prime minister, Ramon stated that "both of them have got their strengths and weaknesses".

"Najib has a track record and so does Anwar. Both have the advantage and similar experiences in being ministers of finance.

"It is the question of how the people want to regard them, as Anwar also has a cloud over his head.

I do not know what to believe

Asked on the 'difficult' question whether he believes in the allegations against Anwar regarding his misadventures of the sexual kind, the veteran Ramon calmly replied, "I don't know what to believe anymore".

"I understand from friends that such practices have happened in public schools not only here but all around the world.

"Recently I find it difficult to accept it, I mean he is not a young boy or young man and he is mature. I am not sure really how much of it is real or how much of it is rhetoric," he said.

Ramon said "we can depend on the court to make judgement" but was quick to add that he does not have enough confidence in the judicial system.

On the leadership of Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Ramon said he remembers the premier to be an honest, straightforward, affable and sincere friend.

"But I'm disappointed and I have told him this but he has his own political judgement, his own sense of destiny and perspective so to speak.

"Maybe his sense of timing went wrong but I wouldn't say he is a failure, I would say he failed us in some aspects but overall don't forget he opened up the system.

"After 22 years of relative suppression and oppression - I don't think you could have this programme, you couldn't have Malaysiakini I think.

"So I think credit must be given where it is due, when a man is down don't stamp on him but my criticism of him is that if he had sincerely introduced the reforms he promoted upon being elected with a tremendous mandate, if he had stepped up the pace I think he would still be able to continue as prime minister," said Ramon.

ramon navaratnam interview 071108 04 "If he had the strong political will and if he is able

to resist the clamour of vested narrow interests he can, but I think he must have the will to bulldoze issues involving the improvement of the judiciary, anti-corruption agency, police reform and so many more.

People want change

These things can be done and there is no need for huge human or financial resources and the country can afford those things, he added.

Other issues discussed during the talk show included a brief view of the recently introduced 2009 Budget.

"I won't say it is all that bad but I think what the government has done is to take into account the new realities.

"The people want change, the people want better distribution of wealth, more care and more allocations for the poor," said Ramon.

He said although Malaysia has United Nation's development goals, politicians must look beyond and stop comparing Malaysia with third-world countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia and African nations.

"We are on the verge of becoming an industrialised country so we must have higher standards and do more to eradicate poverty and improve the education system," said Ramon.

Citing the words of (newly elected US leader) Barack Obama, he said: "Don't protect the rich and the mighty and the powerful but think of the man in the street".

He also stressed that savings in expenditure could be procured by implementing open tenders.

"A high portion of our public expenditure is expended through close tenders or negotiated tenders and that's the easiest way to get people involved in corruption.

Ramon also noted the provision of the New Economic Policy (NEP) which has consistently been debated by politicians.

"The objective of the NEP is to eradicate poverty regardless of races but it has been skewed. I was one of them who helped to draft NEP and I defend it.

"What went wrong is they ignored and neglected some (aspects) ... the privileges only benefit the elite (in the Malay community).

"Poverty is at the highest proportion for the Malays. So what has the Approved Permits done for them? It has created a business class which is fine but very often corrupt and that is how you have money politics in Umno and that's a very serious problem.

This is because it would not only destroy Umno but the whole country, he said.

"We have the indication of approaching a failing state and if we don't watch it, we can fail.

Let's make money

Asked for his opinion why the nation's political leaders are not able to see the problems at hand, Ramon replied, "They can't see because they don't have a long view of life. They are here for one year, two years, four years, eight years ... and they say let's make money.

"I'm sorry to say and it pains me to say this but I belong to a different age group where we didn't have this during (the leadership) of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak and Hussein Onn.

On Indian-based political parties, Ramon felt that Indian-based parties like MIC, PPP and IPF should be disbanded.

"The next best move is to do away with all race-based parties including MIC.

samy vellu and mic 160408He also suggested to MIC president S Samy Vellu to retire from the political scene gracefully.

"(Although) I doubt he will (withdraw) I think he is intelligent enough to recognise that the tide is against him ... for his own sake I wish he will take this time and move and fade away.

"He will be better remembered rather than having to be pushed out... He is a nice man in many ways but sometimes in a political struggle, you lose your judgement, perspective and perception.

Closing the 36-min interview, Ramon stressed that despite all the problems, Malaysia is still a blessed country and that it should be a shining example to the world.

"Be fair, be transparent, be honest and treat everybody equally," he said.

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