

**Ethnicity of PM, should it matter?**  
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**Dr Chris Anthony**

Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said recently that it does not matter if the country's prime minister (PM) is Malay or non-Malay, as long as he enjoys the trust of all Malaysians. He is absolutely right in saying that and that is exactly what most Malaysians believe and want except certain obsolete politicians with ulterior motives who are bent on resorting to racist tactics to remain relevant.

It is wrong to accuse the non-Malays of being racist in wanting a PM from their race. They had accepted five Malay PMs and have come to accept the fact that a Malay should ideally be the PM as they form the majority. There are no qualms about the PM being a Malay as long as he is selected based on his integrity and merit and can carry out his duties diligently and fairly with the welfare of all the citizens at heart.

The overwhelming support given to Anwar Ibrahim to be the PM bears testimony to this fact. As legitimate citizens who are eager to contribute their services to the country they love, the non-Malays do not want to be denied our rights and opportunities just because of our race. Where can we go to if our own country does not want our services?

Ideally however, we should strive for a time in the future when a Malaysian, who has the merits and the support of the majority of the people, regardless of his ethnicity, will be acceptable to the people of all races.

It does not matter who that may be as long as he is selected based on his integrity and merit and not on the colour of his skin. It should not matter whether he is a Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan or Iban but one who will be the PM for all Malaysians and not just for his own community.

Of course, after years of race-based politics, it will not be easy to suddenly discard old ways and adopt a new mindset that does not distinguish between race and religion. The evolution of such an unprejudiced mindset will take a long time but it is important that it must begin now. For a start it is first necessary to see the need for such a change and then make deliberate attempts to do so by getting rid of race-based political parties.

It may be met with tremendous resistance from certain quarters but we will finally prevail if we have a determined will to persevere and overcome whatever obstacles that come in our way. Sadly, it is this will that is lacking, especially among those who are in a position to make that change.

There may be no true multiracial parties yet as even the so-called multiracial parties now are all dominated by a single race. However, unlike the other communal parties, their constitutions do not restrict their membership to a particular race nor stipulate their struggles is to uplift just one particular race.

Moreover, after the last general elections, there have been deliberate attempts by these parties, both in the BN and PR, to strive for multi-racialism. Thanks to the maturity of the people who had departed from their traditional racial line of voting and opted for something that is of greater national importance instead - good governance.

However, instead of listening to the people and adopting a multiracial approach, there are rejuvenated attempts to re-strengthen race politics by resurrecting issues of the past such as the special position of the Malays, Bahasa Malaysia, Islam and the rulers. These have become non- issues now as they have been agreed to and accepted by all in good faith.

So should the constitutional rights of the non-Malays who have become the legitimate citizens of the country. It would be wrong for anyone to keep harping on these issues repeatedly over and over again as that would lead to unnecessary strains on inter-racial relations which is the last thing we need now. Will these attempts to disintegrate an already racially-polarised nation succeed?

The only weapons we have against such racist attempts to undermine the unity among the races are the wisdom and maturity of the people which have been underestimated. Recent trends have indicated that these attributes are on the rise and I am sure that with a wiser and more mature populace, we can thwart all attempts to take the nation backwards.

The people are in a better position to appreciate the need for closer cooperation among the races so as to remain competitive in the global market. They are not going to allow the minority to break the spirit of the majority.

The real resistance to multi-racialism comes from the traditional race-based parties in the BN, particularly Umno, the dominant partner in the coalition. Nevertheless even within Umno, MCA and MIC, there are already calls (although not overwhelming) for the opening up their membership to all races.

There is even a suggestion that Umno should open itself up to all and rename itself United Malaysians National Organisation. These are very encouraging signs that indicate the people will ultimately reject race-based politics and that such a divisive paradigm would meet its demise in the years ahead.

The people are definitely beginning to realise the benefits of a stronger opposition such as the recent drop in fuel prices by the government that is unprecedented. They would continue to ensure that we have a strong and credible opposition in the future.

We may be going down the path of the more developed countries and going for a two-party system that will provide a better check and balance governance that provides for greater accountability and transparency. Our political parties have no option but to change and if they are adamant not to, they will become irrelevant in the not so distant future.