

**A non-Malay PM not a priority right now**  
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Obamamania is the new global phenomenon. When he toured Europe before the US presidential election, he was given a rock star welcome by the huge crowds. Few doubt his political talent, intelligence and charisma, and his rise offers hope, though still symbolic, to political underdogs of the world.

In a troubled world without heroes, Obama offers hope, if only to bring about change in a world troubled by extremism of one kind or another or perhaps to cast a wary eye over friendly countries like Malaysia which practises political persecution.

Indeed it is the audacity of hope or perhaps its desperateness that makes Malaysians claim Obama's victory as if it was their own. Nothing short of audacity can make Malaysians pin their hopes on the desired change under the circumstances.

The euphoria is somewhat mystifying. Maybe deep down in each of us is what Abraham Maslow described as the need for 'self-actualisation' in our hierarchy of needs. In our need to achieve, many see Obama's victory as a possibility for themselves. Suddenly you don't need to be a white to run the most powerful nation in the world anymore.

In Malaysia Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and even Dr Mahathir Mohammed agree that a non-Malay can be prime minister of Malaysia. But in a country that looks good on paper but not always in practice, they are probably right. Nothing in the Malaysian federal constitution stipulates the race of the person for the top job.

But who seriously believes it will happen? Nevertheless many see Obama's victory as the turning point in history, the end of racial hegemony. The race barrier has been broken.

However symbolic victories need to face reality especially in a country like Malaysia where political power means government contracts and the easy route to riches and the lure and love of money is everything to some people.

But for true believers fighting for change in their own country they can take the cue from Obama's victory and perhaps that is all they can do and fight their own battles.

There is no political link between what happens in Malaysia and the US but Obama's victory does signal a pivotal change against racist agendas, against those who say you can't lead a nation because of your race.

There is a message for governments and voters in countries like Fiji and Malaysia that still insist that their leader must be from the majority race. Suddenly the US is no longer the pariah because a non-white is in charge. Race does matter after all but in a different and positive way.

Wanting to see a Chinese or Indian or Dayak Malaysian prime minister is vastly different from insisting that a prime minister must always be a Malay. Not all considerations of race can be lumped in together with the racism. Nationhood and Ketuanan Melayu or Cina or India or whatever are conflicting and incompatible.

There is however a common thread between the pre-Obama victory US situation and those countries longing for change. They all are fed up with the status quo. In the US it was an extreme Bush regime, in Malaysia it is abuse of power and corruption.

According to Mahathir it is all outgoing PM Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's fault. The failure of Pak Lah to deliver reforms dashed the hopes of many Malaysians who had placed their trust in him.

For them now, with Najib Razak taking over in March next year tainted by allegations of his link to murdered Mongolian translator Altantuya Shaaribuu, it is hope against hope, at least until the next elections.

But to blame the outgoing leader for the corrupt dealings in Umno as Mahathir has done may not be true or fair. After all, one can easily point the finger at Mahathir for his choice of successor.

The fact is contemporary Malaysia is like medieaval Japan, ruled by a Shogun but the real powerbrokers are the daimyo. It is still a feudal state, or in the words of Mahathir, in the modern context 'a police state'. But the effect is the same.

And key police officers are akin to the loyal and unquestioning samurai - the enforcers, and judges are allegedly controlled by the warlords in power. Perhaps that is why outgoing PM Abdullah is keen to see the judiciary reformed before he leaves office.

The root problem is the abuse of power and corruption in the country.

You only need to see how unparliamentary the proceedings are at parliament where elected representatives of the people cannot raise legitimate topics and get a decent and fair say and hearing because of the house speaker's bias. The integrity and usefulness of parliament as a place of debate and to act as the moral conscience of the nation is under a cloud.

Obama's victory does seem irrelevant to most Malaysians because they are not in desperate need of a non-Malay country leader. Race is not the issue. They desperately need a true leader whatever his race.

They need a good and decent prime minister who will be true to the spirit of the constitution, have the utmost respect for the rights of the rakyat, honour the august house of parliament and allow proper and free debate, encourage media freedom that exposes fraud and corruption, and so on. And above all be a leader for every Malaysian.

They don't care which party he belongs to. They thought they had one such leader after the 2004 elections. But they were wrong. Malaysians are desperate for a leader who will govern for all and not only exploit race and indulge in political rhetoric.

Obama did not once hint that his campaign was to strengthen the black cause. Yet the huge majority of blacks voted for him. So much so that after his win he could declare, 'I am your president...even to those who did not vote for me'.

Those who may rejoice at Obama's win and declare the US as coming of age etc may have gone overboard and overlooked that many Americans also did not support him. But a win is still a win and hope is still hope even if it clings to a straw.

In Malaysia right now the struggle is not for the minority races to have one of their own

elected for the top job. The struggle is for a decent leader without taint of scandal or hint of cronyism to lead the country.

The struggle in Malaysia is to find a clean, efficient and trustworthy leader who will do what a good leader is supposed to do. The country is sinking dangerously into a quagmire and the government is still chasing phantoms.

Malaysia desperately needs a leader to lead them out of the cesspit of abuse, lawlessness and corruption. Obama can't do that. But a local son can.

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