



**Najib vs Anwar in Wall Street Journal
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It is often rare to see the Wall Street Journal devoting an entire page to views from Malaysia. But today was one of those uncommon days - a view by Prime Minister Najib Razak and the other by Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim.

Except for the coincidence of being on the same page, the similarity ends there when one goes through their opinions with a fine tooth comb.

In his opinion piece entitled, 'Finding unity in Malaysia's diversity', Najib touches on the touchy subject of religion, especially in the aftermath of the recent vandalism on churches and other houses of worship in the country.

He said Malaysia was certainly not the first country where a few individuals had committed criminal acts under the pretence of supporting a particular religion.

But he argued that the true spirit of the nation had shone through where Malaysians, across religions and races, had spoken with a unified voice in condemning the despicable acts of a few.

"I am determined that the vandalism of places of worship and arson at the Metro Tabernacle Church and the powerful response from everyday Malaysians can be transformed into a moment from which we can learn," he wrote.

"We will bring the perpetrators to justice. But this will also be a time when we stand united as one people to unequivocally denounce violence and reaffirm that we remain committed to the national drive we call 1Malaysia."

Najib also touched on various reforms that were being undertaken, like liberalising the economy, improving healthcare and extending educational opportunities to all Malaysians, and acknowledged that reforms had sometimes been politically difficult.

"But they are important because the long-term health of Malaysia's society and the economy can only be built on what unites rather than what divides us. We will not waver from the pursuit of 1Malaysia," he wrote.

"Let us be honest in recognizing that religious beliefs are deeply held, and in the legal case currently pending related to non-Muslims' use of the word 'Allah' in Malay-language publications, there are passionate views on many sides. As a nation, we will work together to resolve this issue."

Malaysia's image taken a beating

In contrast, Anwar argues that the country has been getting international headlines for the wrong reasons.

In his opinion piece, 'Muslims have no monopoly over Allah', he says that the vision of Malaysia as a peaceful and stable location for investment, tourism and migration is now in peril.

Malaysia's reputation as a nation at peace with its ethnic and religious diversity is at stake,

he asserts.

"We have seen Muslims around the world protest against discriminatory laws passed in supposedly liberal and progressive countries in the West. Yet just as France and Germany have their issues with the 'burqa' and Switzerland with its minarets, so too does Malaysia frequently fail to offer a safe and secure environment that accommodates its minority communities.

Anwar blamed the 'Allah' controversy on a "few reckless politicians, the mainstream media and a handful of NGOs linked by membership and leadership to Umno".

"For example, *Utusan Malaysia*, the nation's largest Malay-language daily - which is also owned by Umno - has inflamed Muslim religious sentiments by accusing non-Muslims of desecrating the name of the 'Muslim' God and alleging a Christian conspiracy to overrun this predominantly Muslim nation through conversion.

"I have seen these incendiary propaganda techniques used before, when politicians and demagogues exploit public sentiment to garner support by fomenting fear."

Anwar argued that Malaysia cannot afford to be held hostage by the vested interests of a few who manipulate faith and identity as a means to elicit fear for political and economic gain.

"This is old politics, and it has become clear that those who incite hatred are only doing so to prolong their monopoly on power.

"The majority of Malaysians reject this approach. They realize that overcoming the challenges we face - a stagnant economy, declining educational standards and rising crime - depends on our ability as a nation to internalize and make real the principles of fairness and justice to all."

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