

The Faith Of The Malaysian Prime Minister Is Irrelevant
Malaysianmirror.com
May 12, 2011

Utusan Malaysia's scaremongering has backfired because many sensible people, many of whom are Muslims, have not rejected a non-Muslim Malaysian Prime Minister and reaffirmed that faith and gender, are irrelevant.

Perhaps, this is not the response that Utusan predicted. But that is what happens with irresponsible reporting.

The sense that Malaysia's 13th General Election might mark the end of BN domination was captured by Utusan Malaysia's fear tactics and Umno's 'politics of distraction'.

There is no denying that BN is in trouble. When the opposition reduced Sarawak Chief Minister Taib Mahmud's share of the vote in Sarawak and PAS refused to be entertained by Umno to merge, Umno realised that there was one avenue left to prompt the Malays into action. Fear.

The twin evils of race and religion are tried and tested weapons in Umno's arsenal. In earlier times, Utusan found the Malaysian Chinese a convenient scapegoat. This time round, Utusan decided that Christianity would become the political punch-bag.

Last Saturday, Utusan deliberately provoked anger with front-page headlines entitled "Kristian agama rasmi?" (Christianity the official religion?).

The article, which was based on the postings of two pro-Umno bloggers, accused both the DAP and a group of Christian pastors of plotting to overthrow the Agong, install Christianity as the official state religion and pave the way for a Christian prime minister.

The reaction from a section of the Malay community has been predictable. Perkasa lodged a series of police reports in every state. In their opinion, the 'Christian state issue' was a threat to national security. Pembela went one further and stated that the Christians were on a mission to convert Muslims in the country.

So, instead of a mass protest from the general public, only Muslim NGOs and Malay rights groups mobilised themselves to state their objections.

Unfortunately for Utusan, the Vice-president of PAS, Mahfuz Omar, confirmed that his party had no intention of barring a non-Muslim from becoming prime minister.

He said, "The constitution does not bar a non-Muslim from becoming PM, so it's not even an issue of whether PAS will stop it or not".

But it is the reactions of various ministers which are telling.

Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein's initial reaction was to state that the Utusan article about the DAP-Christian pastors pact, made Christian-Muslim relations in the country even more tense and that it "would provoke reactions from the other races".

Hishammuddin's mistake was to not check on the veracity of the report because it had been based on unsubstantiated blog postings.

In his attempt to defuse the tension, Prime minister Najib Abdul Razak pointed out that 'Islam would remain the religion of the federation'.

He said, "This is because the reality is that we have the Federal Constitution, and its provision on the position of Islam and the other religions is very clear..... the Federal Constitution cannot be amended and as such, no one should be worried or feel uneasy on this matter."

Ever since the controversy rocked Malaysia, both the Christian group and the DAP have denied the allegation, and slammed Utusan for printing "dangerous lies".

Various constitutional experts as well as federal cabinet minister Bernard Dompok have been prompted into making various declarations that the constitution does not stipulate the religious affiliation of the prime minister.

Article 3(1) of the Federal Constitution does not position Islam as the "official" religion of the country.

However, it does state that "Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation."

Moreover, when it comes to the position of the prime minister, the Federal Constitution does not expressly specify race or religious requirements.

In addition, Article 43(2)(a) of the constitution states only that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall appoint as PM a member of Parliament who in his judgment is likely to command the confidence of the majority of the Dewan Rakyat.

Perhaps, Najib is a little confused. Malaysians are not questioning the status of Islam. They are however, incensed why Utusan, and the two bloggers who started this, have not been punished for spreading malicious lies and tension.

Utusan, a major Malaysian newspaper has acted irresponsibly but has escaped censure.

Utusan's tactic, with or without the collusion of Umno's top leaders, has backfired. Instead of creating fear in the Malays, the whole of Malaysia is now involved in a useful debate about the qualities of a good Prime Minister.

Clearly 54 years of Umno at the country's helm and having a succession of Muslim PMs have not eradicated corruption, abuses of power and office, injustice and racism. Perhaps it is time for a change.

Malaysians want a PM that looks after the interests of all of its people, not just select portions of society.

The right candidate's faith is irrelevant. What matters is that the person is decisive, responsible, listens well, has the courage of his convictions, can motivate all Malaysians, is a good negotiator, understands Malaysian problems both from the domestic and international viewpoint, is also a good conciliator, carries himself well, can debate a point logically and intelligently (rather than resorting to sex and smear), is compassionate and has vision.

If a non-Muslim is capable of leading the nation, then why not? And if a woman can take the

top job, then so be it. What matters is Malaysia, not the faith of the person who is to be PM.

MARIAM MOKHTAR

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.

Source : <http://www.malaysianmirror.com/media-buzz-detail/6-nation/53278>