

THE STAR

DATE: 27/1/2010



Two approaches to Allah' issue

Articles in the Wall Street Journal by Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim show their contrasting approaches and political styles.

DATUK Seri Anwar Ibrahim has been on the *ceramah* trail the past couple of weeks. The last time he was this busy was when making his comeback as Permatang Pauh MP more than a year ago.

His sodomy trial starts next Tuesday and all this political activity is a sort of pre-trial campaign to reach out to as wide an audience as he can.

The Opposition Leader's oratory at these *ceramah* have assumed a certain pattern.

Apart from providing his take on the forthcoming trial, his chief target has been Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, the man who stands in the way of his political ambitions.

The PKR leader has also been at pains to explain his party's stand on the controversial "Allah" issue and at times, has come across as rather defensive especially when the audience is Malay and rural.

An overwhelming majority of Malay-Muslims are very uncomfortable with the High Court ruling in allowing the use of the word "Allah" in *The Herald* and Anwar has been grappling with the Malay-Muslim sentiment on the ground.

But his stand would go down

well with the Western liberals who want to see Islam in a way convenient to them.

This came across quite clearly in the *Wall Street Journal* which published two articles yesterday on the issue - one by Najib and the other by Anwar.

Najib's piece was titled, "Finding Unity in Diversity" while Anwar's carried the heading, "Muslims have no Monopoly over 'Allah'."

The articles were quite a contrast, not only in content but in reflecting the priorities and political styles of the two men.

The Allah issue has become very political and at the same time very personal to the religious beliefs of the various communities.

Najib chose not to take the political argument. He pointed out that citizen action and spirit had prevailed in helping to maintain calm and peace following attacks on places of worship.

»Everyone wants a peaceful and acceptable solution to the 'Allah' issuer

There is no denying Najib has been under a great deal of pressure over this issue and he admitted there are passionate views on many sides and that this was a complex issue that the Government was trying to resolve .

He spoke about the reform path that his administration would take

and said Malaysia's society and the economy could only be built on that which unites rather than which divides.

His message was not about blame or justification but about unity, building bridges and looking forward.

As he put it: "I am determined that the vandalism of the places of worship and arson at the Tabernacle (the church that suffered the most damage) and the powerful response from everyday Malaysians can be transformed into a moment from which we can learn."

Anwar, in his article, offered a concerted argument why Muslim do not own the word Allah.

But the politician in Anwar dominated in his article and he pinned the blame for what had happened squarely on reckless politicians, the mainstream media and NGOs linked to Umno.

He accused these quarters of fermenting fear to divert attention from controversial court decisions and missing jet engines.

It was the written form of what he had been saying at many of his *ceramah*, a political attack on his chief nemesis Najib and the ruling coalition.

He went beyond the Allah issue and pronounced this country as going down the drain because of corruption, incompetence and religious extremism.

He said the vision of Malaysia as a peaceful and stable location was in peril.

Anwar, some fear, is about to launch a repeat what he had done back in 1998 when he came under siege for charges of corruption and sodomy.

He blamed Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his troubles and in his anger, he not only ran down the former Prime Minister but the system and the country on the international front.

Anwar, they say, should try to draw the line between his personal issues and his politics from that of the country's interests.

There is no denying that race relations have been affected by what has happened. Malaysians of all races are concerned about the future.

Some are pessimistic, others more hopeful. But what everyone wants now are solutions rather than finger-pointing.

Everyone wants a peaceful and acceptable solution to the "Allah" issue and the politics of blame will not help.