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NEWS

'I could not accept Anwar's moral defect'

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Malay language.

(By) not wanting to learn Mathematics and Science in English, we are cutting ourselves from modern knowledge and we would be going backwards.

Question: Lim Kit Siang is a permanent feature of Malaysian politics. With DAP's capture of Penang, he had the opportunity to help the economic development there. How much do you feel he has accomplished as a nation-builder?

Answer: I think development requires certain skills and a certain drive, but when you are deflected by politics, by the need for you to stay popular with certain segments of the people, then you cannot focus on development, especially development that may benefit not only yourself, but the people who are opposed to you.

Question: After the shock election results of 2008, Perkasa popped up and has been very active within the political sphere. The Chinese community, however, has taken a rather dim view of Perkasa. Do you see Perkasa as a temporary phenomenon? If BN wins big, do you see Perkasa re-treating to the background?

Answer: After 2008, there were hundreds of Malay non-governmental organisations, but Perkasa is the most vocal and the biggest. We cannot reject them as being non-Umno. We have to work with them. Otherwise, Umno will be a tiny organisation quite unable to get either Chinese or Malay support.

I do not know what its role would be after that (May 5 election), but Perkasa, during elections, supports BN, not just Umno. It supports the Chinese and Indians in BN. That, it makes clear. It does not support the extremists coming from the opposition party.

Question: Coming back to the issue of education, it seems as if the Malay language has been corrupted beyond belief. English is being introduced willy-nilly as Malay words. For example, the term "chief inspector" is now "cif inspektor".

Answer: Yes, the Malay language is absorbing a lot of foreign words — this is historical. If you study the Malay language and its development, you will find that it has been absorbing foreign words all along. Many words are not available in Malay — they can coin new words

or they have to adopt new words.

They have adopted (words from) Sanskrit, Persian and other languages, especially Arabic.

Now, of course, they are adopting English (words), but the sad thing is, even when there is a Malay word for it, they prefer the English word. At the same time, with these English words, they condemn the use of English (in schools).

Question: You can not learn English by learning Malay...

Answer: (laughs) The words are there, but the composition is all wrong. For example, I had someone tell me once, that so-and-so "should go for a urine". I could not understand what he meant by 'go for a urine'. What he meant was: "go for a urine test" (laughs). But he left out the word "test". *Kena pi urine, la.*

Question: You have always spoken of your support for Chinese businesses, their entrepreneurial zeal and how their hardworking culture helped Malaysia grow. Do you think that we are not seeing the full potential of the Chinese community, given the nature of the education system?

Answer: Actually, if you make a comparison, many would say that the NEP stands in the way of the development of the economy. It is true. If there was no NEP, this country would probably develop much faster.

But it would be very unstable because it would mean that (differences between) the rich and the poor are accentuated by the differences in race. The Chinese would be rich and the Malays would be poor. And that would lead to instability.

It can work in Singapore because Malays are only 15 per cent of the population, but here, Malays make up 60 per cent.

(The Chinese) are very dynamic. Left to themselves, they would probably (cause) this country (to grow) much faster, but it would be an unhealthy growth.

As far as "potential" is concerned, though, I think they have been able to harness the maximum potential within the context of the need for us to distribute wealth fairly. Not equally, but fairly.

Question: Your thoughts on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim are well documented. But we would like to revisit events in 1998 — were you under the impression that he would go away and not have chosen to fight?

Answer: Many people have been expelled from Umno and they go away quietly. Even myself, I was ex-



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad believes that the Chinese business community is able to harness the maximum potential in the fair distribution of wealth.

pelled for a time (being). I did not go against the party. I still supported the party from the outside, but Anwar is different.

Anwar is not Umno, really. He came to Umno because if he joined Pas, he would never have had a chance to become prime minister. He joined Umno because he knew that if he could climb up the leadership ladder, that he would become PM one day.

The only thing was that he expected this to be accomplished in ten years because normally, PMs do not stay (for) very long. Apart from Tunku, who stayed (on for) 13 years, all the rest had less than six years.

So, he thought that I would stay for, at the most, 10 years. He would come up to become deputy PM and deputy president of the party, and then, after 10 years, I would step down and he would become PM.

But as events turned out, I stayed on until very late, up to 1998 — that is almost 17 years. That was very

long and he had become impatient, but he would still have had the chance. The main reason he lost the chance was because of his moral character. That, I could not accept.

He lost his chance and he became very bitter, of course. His strategy through Umno failed, (so) now, what could he do? He must gather strength.

He went to DAP and Pas and persuaded them that if they did not work together, they were going to lose the elections. "We work together, form a kind of coalition and support each other. Then, we can win the elections". So again, he is trying to find another route to (become) PM. His main obsession is to become PM.

Question: Was your judgment of Anwar then grounded more in his moral character or his handling of the economy as finance minister at the time?

Answer: Yes, he appeared unable to manage the economy, but even

then, I was not really bothered because I was expecting him to take over from me.

When he went around meeting Umno divisions, becoming friendly with schoolteachers' unions, even when I heard stories about how he tried to denigrate me by saying that I practised cronyism — that did not matter to me because I was going to step down anyway, but his moral defect... it was something I could not accept.

He is a very smart man, very charismatic, able to get around people. He can be friendly with the Jews and at the same time, give (off) the image of a Muslim zealot and yet, be acceptable to European liberals. He is a fantastic man, a fantastic man!

In a way, he is a chameleon. His colours turn to suit the environment he is in.

Tomorrow: Dr Mahathir's assessment of Datuk Seri Najib Razak's first four years as prime minister.