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rights and freedoms. More are being planned as part of a determined effort to quash all dissent, all criticism, all opposition.

As well, the continuing manipulation of race and religion is slowly but surely edging us towards the abyss. People are jittery. Rumours spread quickly. At this rate, it won't take much to reach breaking point.

At the same time, our once stable, secular and moderate nation is gradually morphing into a hotbed for extremism and intolerance. Who would have thought that a senior mufti would declare his fellow citizens "kafir harabi" and be defended by senior establishment figures? Who would have thought that dozens of young Malaysians would be sucked into radical jihadi movements?

We have also experienced the first ISIS attack on our homeland and, as the Inspector-General of Police has warned, more attacks are now a possibility. In short, time is not on our side. How long can we continue to spiral downwards and not reach the point of no return?

### *Mahathir or Najib?*

The urgency of the moment compels us all to now consider what was perhaps unthinkable before – looking to Mahathir, as bitter a pill to swallow as that may be for some.

Mahathir may not be the ideal candidate to lead the charge for change but, like it or not, he is now the only one with the experience, the standing and the gravitas to seriously challenge UMNO-BN.

Of course, it's a sad commentary of where we are as a nation but the stark choice before us is Mahathir, warts and all, or the prospect of sliding further into a failed state overwhelmed by corruption, racial division and religious extremism. These are desperate times; we simply do not have the luxury of better options, more democratic leaders or more perfect men. It's Mahathir or Najib; take your pick.

Even Anwar Ibrahim, who has arguably suffered more at the hands of Mahathir than anyone else, considers Mahathir's latest move a "positive step." If Anwar is willing to put aside his own grievances against Mahathir for the sake of the greater national interest, can we do any less?

Furthermore, the fact that the UMNO-BN propaganda machine is now working overtime to discredit Mahathir's new party, even before it is launched, is a sure sign that they are worried and afraid, and that says something about its potential.

After all, UMNO's nightmare has always been a strong Malay-Muslim leader at the head of a united multiracial opposition; that's why Anwar was seen as such a threat and that's why Mahathir might be able to do what others can't. And finally, although he is loathe to admit it, one wonders if now, in the winter of his life, Mahathir finally sees the folly of his policies, and wants to make it right. At 91, this may well be his last chance to redeem himself, his legacy and the