

Marzuki looks to Dr M to save him from scandal

pg. 10

The Star - 9/2/2019

The fake degree firestorm that is threatening to bring down the Deputy Foreign Minister could not have happened at a worse time for Bersatu.

Comment by JOCELINE TAN

DEPUTY Foreign Minister Datuk Marzuki Yahya's political career was on the rise, especially after he was appointed to the key post of secretary-general of Bersatu.

But the ground seems to be crumbling under his feet ever since the news broke about his fake university degree.

The Kedah-born Marzuki is fighting for his survival even as the cruel world of social media has pronounced him guilty and is demanding that he resigns from his Foreign Ministry job.

There is a firestorm of public opinion out there over what has been dubbed the "Scambridge scandal".

Nobody, including Marzuki himself, had questioned post-May 9 media reports that he graduated from the prestigious Cambridge University.

But when the scandal broke, Marzuki clarified that it was Cambridge International University in the United States which, to his further embarrassment, turned out to be a degree mill.

By then, the issue had acquired a life of its own, beyond his control or that of his party.

The prevailing opinion on social media is that if he cannot be honest about something as simple as his academic background, how can he be trusted on affairs of state?

It has been pointed out that if this was the private sector, the person would have been fired without further ado because it is a question of his credibility and integrity.

The question on everyone's lips is whether Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad will take the necessary action to safeguard the image of his government and party.

As former Jelutong MP Jeff Ooi pointed out, the collateral damage to Bersatu is high given that Marzuki is the party's secretary-general.

It is not only the party of the Prime Minister, Bersatu is supposed to be the backbone of Pakatan Harapan, and it aims to replace Umno as the party of choice for Malays.

"It's messy and it looks quite indefensible because he is not a small fry. He has a big post and is the face of our Foreign Ministry," said Ooi.

And as some have pointed out, where is Malaysia going to put her face when Marzuki comes face-to-face with, for example, Singapore ministers, many of whom are genuine Oxbridge products.

"I have known Marzuki since our days in Umno Youth, and he never claimed he was from Cambridge University. My personal experience with him is that he is always supportive and has integrity as a politician," said Bersatu

supreme council member Akhramsyah Sanusi.

But Akhramsyah, who is also Mara Corp chairman, admitted he was shocked by the public furore.

"I want to stress that he was chosen as a deputy minister mainly for his experience and sacrifices for the party.

"We want our leaders to be of the highest integrity but I also believe in giving people a second chance," said Akhramsyah.

The Marzuki scandal could not have happened at a worse time for Bersatu which is facing a pivotal by-election in Semeniyih.

It also opened the floodgates to greater scrutiny of the educational background of other Pakatan leaders including two Mentris Besar, both of who are from Bersatu.

Several Pakatan leaders have jumped to their defence, saying that one does not need a degree to be an effective politician.

They are perfectly right except that the issue here concerns the integrity of politicians who have fake qualifications.

Marzuki is also on the threshold of possibly being declared the real winner for the Tasik Gelugor parliamentary seat in Penang.

Marzuki, who lost the seat in the general election by only 81 votes, applied to the courts for a recount on the grounds there were 297 unreturned postal votes and 689 spoilt votes.

The scandal has cast a pall over the court application.

Those familiar with Dr Mahathir do not expect him to ask Marzuki to resign.

The elderly leader has a track record of defending the indefensible for as long as the person is his loyalist.

But this is New Malaysia. If Dr Mahathir decides to save Marzuki, he will not get the same docile reaction from the public as during his first round as Prime Minister.

Nevertheless, he will have the last say as the Prime Minister and chairman of his party.

The fake degree scandal underscores the perception that Bersatu is seriously short of qualified and capable people to fill government posts. This issue is one more reason why Dr Mahathir should reshuffle his Cabinet sooner rather than later.

It will be awkward for Marzuki to continue in foreign affairs. If Dr Mahathir decides to keep him, he may want to put Marzuki where he does not have to represent the country.

Perhaps the most baffling thing about this whole rigmorole is that in the Internet era, where almost everything one does has a digital footprint, there are still people who think they can get away with faking their academic qualifications.

"Let this serve as a lesson for New Malaysia," said Ooi.