

# CAN'T SHAKE FIXATION ON VEHICLES

NST- 1/12/2022 pg. 5



AZMI ANSHAR

Anwar announces cancellation of a government order for Mercedes-Maybach S600

**W**HAT is it about Malays and them brandishing their automobiles, especially new ones, on social media?

The automobile can be an expensive continental beast or a multipurpose vehicle, or a national car. It doesn't matter.

The hot rod can be super pricey or super cheap, as long as it is brand new.

This holds true for a segment of Malays.

If they acquire a windfall that can settle their debt or buttress altruistic demands, chances are a major portion of it will be used to buy automobiles, high-powered cars, sport utility vehicles, motorcycles and even bicycles.

The automobiles can be the latest model before boredom sets in and the bank loan is refinanced to get a flashier vehicle.

The obsession with luxury vehicles has gone nationwide.

Huge federal funds were channelled to an east coast state government years back and, lo and behold, their top administrators gifted themselves luxurious cars.

It's a tone-deaf gangster move while their constituents survive on instant noodles, rice and salted fish.

Malays are indulgent about their own influencers too, some so drenched in opulence that their cars are parked in air-conditioned garage the size of a godown.

Of course, there are exceptions. One wealthy banker, also an ex-minister, drives around in a battered national car.

A certain ex-premier loves national cars, provided they are his brainchild, to the extent that he'd drive the tiny machine to an official meeting or party assembly



The Toyota Camry used by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim about to leave the PKR headquarters in Petaling Jaya on Monday. PIC BY SAIFULLIZAN TAMADI

to provide it with free advertising.

But for test drives, he'd be loaned sedans, which he'd drive at such high speed on highways that his security detail struggled to keep up.

Then there is the son of a former minister caught driving a monster truck in his father's constituency of conservative and B40 folks. The crassness.

It is a puzzling Malay psyche reinforced by this ageless aphorism: "biar papa asalkan bergaya" (let there be poverty as long as it's stylish).

Which brings us to this revelation by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He announced the cancellation of a government order for a Mercedes-Maybach S600, a luxury saloon with a cool starting price of RM1.35 million.

It was discovered that the order was invoiced during the first coup's prime minister but his successor balked at the excessive plenitude, and sat on the order in case he was accused of shamelessness.

Anwar was content with a

handy Japanese sedan as his official car, or if need be, "any car that's available".

During the pre-14th General Election administration, the then PM, basking in luxury accessories while getting caught with his hands in government coffers, was conservative in his choice of official car, a high-end national car variant.

After he was dumped in the election, the official car was de-commissioned and replaced by black MPVs for top administrators and leased at a princely sum of RM5,759: RM4,852 rental and RM908 maintenance.

The RM1.42 million bill went to the concessionaire, but the switch was considered a waste of public funds by the opposition.

This was on top of a RM30 million renovation to Seri Perdana, the prime minister's official residence. The order for the S600 was reported to have originated from the Prime Minister's Department, but it doesn't matter.

The government is Malay-centric, so this obsession with acquiring a saloon is consistent with the poser mentioned earlier

in this column. Anwar's action to cancel the S600 purchase is admirable at a time when the country faces economic headwinds.

Yes, spending during a recession may be sound economics, provided the money goes to projects that spur net gains and soothe people's bread-and-butter concerns.

The ex-premier of the first coup has yet to respond to the implication stemming from Anwar's stance, but the second post-coup PM, through an aide, said there was "nothing extraordinary" about Anwar turning down a new official vehicle because the ex-PM had also rejected the use of a new car.

Then there's the elephant in the room: the RM500 billion Covid-19 expenditure during the Movement Control Order in 2020 under the first coup PM's watch.

Anwar may be urged to publicise the accountability of this huge spending, which were measures to help Malaysians deal with their loss of livelihoods during lockdown and the procurement of vaccines.

Since the politicians responsible for the massive spending are out of government, Anwar can get to the bottom of the disbursement.

He has these options: **TABLE** an account of the funds' outflow;

**REQUEST** a Public Accounts Committee probe when Parliament reconvenes;

**INSTRUCT** the auditor general to file a report; or,

**CALL** for a Royal Commission of Inquiry.

Or, the ex-PM, if he fulfils his role presumably as opposition leader, and for the sake of goodwill, can submit an acceptable form of accounting for the RM500 billion expenditure and wait for the government's assessment.

Expectations of Anwar are not just high, they are stratospheric.

Will Anwar get all the help he can get? Or will he be subverted by malevolent forces losing their minds over his powers?

The writer's opinions are his own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NST