

How to grade the Prime Minister

RECENTLY, at a forum organised by a news portal, one of the panelists, a veteran editor from that portal, gave Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim a grade of D- in evaluating his first year as PM. Before that, former health minister Khairy Jamaluddin gave Anwar a B-.

If someone cared to ask me what grade I would give the PM and the unity government, I would say a good A. Why this discrepancy in the three grades? Let me elaborate my years of formulating evaluation criteria as an educator and as a Muslim.

I would look at five aspects of the performance of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet ministers.

The first thing I look at is how sensitive issues were handled. The second is how difficult it was to build consensus in a team that has former enemies on it. The third aspect is what are the limitations faced when coming into a new place or organisation.

The fourth thing I would consider is the Malay and Islamic adab (etiquette) in criticising a leader or an elder. Finally, was there a sense of "tawadhu", or humility, when considering whether one can actually replace the person who is being criticised?

Let's analyse the three grades mentioned above within the first aspect of my marking scheme: how sensitive issues were handled.

In dealing with, for example, the Coldplay concert and the Swatch rainbow watches issues, there were acute religious and

With the recent anniversary of the unity government, everyone is evaluating the government's performance. Our columnist offers his grading criteria as a guide.

**MOHD
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Over the top

Malay sensitivities involved. I am sure KJ - as Khairy is popularly known - understands this but I wonder if the editor of the news portal did not care to take into consideration any sensitivities and graded Anwar way down for his "failure" to stand firm and be "progressive".

Now, I personally have no issues with the LGBT+ thing, unlike most of my Muslim family and friends, and have no issues with the rainbow people or Swatch watches. But I am very aware of the conservative nature of Muslims and Malays even among my family and friends to the point that I would not really dare to say anything.

With these two issues, Coldplay and Swatch, Anwar allowed the concert but was silent on the police confiscating the watches. I call that a win and good diplomacy. If Anwar was PM in the 1970s, he would be more "progressive" perhaps - but we don't know.

Things were different then and

now, and to recognise that is essential in evaluating someone's performance.

Now, the second aspect, building consensus. Well, building consensus during the time when Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was PM in the 1980s and the present time are two very extremely different scenarios.

Tun M was emperor and master of all. People were scared of him as he amassed total power. Would any one of us even dare to grade the PM then? I would not.

But Anwar is faced with politicians who he once was at war with like those from Umno, GPS and GRS.

I believe Transport Minister and DAP secretary-general Anthony Loke is the most incredible politician of all to apologise on behalf of his party to Abang Jo (Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg), thus helping to bring GPS into the unity government - and preventing Malaysia from becoming the most radicalised state in South-East Asia under the Opposition.

Apparently, some people who grade the PM harshly do not seem to appreciate this.

The third aspect, about limitations faced when coming into a new place or organisation - well, inheriting a country with a debt of RM1.5 trillion is no joke, man.

But obviously some don't care about that at all and don't consider the difficulty it poses.

Having new and young faces helming ministries, like Rafizi Ramli, Fadhlina Sidek, Fahmi Fadzil and others, is a challenge.

Can we, in all honesty and compassion, grade the newbies by expecting them to perform miracles without so much as a learning curve? What kind of people are we to not cut newcomers some slack in their first year? Here, newbies, your first year grade is a D-! Wah, garang and inconsiderate boss!

On to the fourth consideration, about criticising someone older and more experienced according to Malay and Islamic adab. For example, if we have to criticise our father: Would we say, hey father you do not know how to take care of your wife and children and I give you a D-minus?

The Quran says that you must not be disrespectful to your parents by saying, uh, literally anything. So Muslims must use the proper decorum and manners as well as words to raise issues or suggest changes to an elderly person or a leader. The Prophet said that one must respect the leader even if he were a small-headed man from a lowly upbringing.

My fifth and last consideration is the sense of tawadhu' or humility. When I think about criticising a person, I will ask first whether I would be able to slip into his or her shoes and be a better prime minister or minister than that particular person within the same

social, religious and political mess that we are in at the moment.

I can safely say that I can perhaps do a better job at some ministries but not others and certainly not in the PM's seat.

But some people air their criticisms on social media without ever thinking of this Islamic sense of tawadhu'.

Judging from the comments I read, I truly believe that we Malaysians fully deserve the mediocre country that we are living in. I used to think that it was all the fault of politicians, but now I know the captain probably has a crappy crew. Sorry to be a bit blunt and harsh, yes, I said "crappy".

If we do not look deep into ourselves in a spiritual way, we may be the cause of the own destruction of our own nation. For a ship to run true, the captain and the crew must have trust and respect for each other. Communication and criticism must be handled with care, decorum and by taking into context the engulfing situation. Without respect and trust, we are done for. And I will have to consider abandoning this boat before it sinks.

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