

Heat over Zahid's DNAA simmers on

It is a waste of breath for the unity government to go on justifying why there is no case against the Umno president because public opinion has been set from day one.

IT was the most stormy day in Parliament since Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim became Prime Minister.

No one, whether from the Opposition or government bench or even the Speaker, who is known for his tough-talking style, can be remotely proud of the commotion in Parliament earlier this week.

The Opposition showed such disrespect for the Prime Minister. Yes, they do not need to like Anwar, but they should respect the chair that he represents and the fact that he was there to wind up on the mid-term review of the 12th Malaysia Plan.

The government bench reciprocated the bad behaviour with their own brand of misbehaviour.

Speaker Tan Sri Johari Abdul struggled to control the floor and it did not help that his son, Sungai Petani MP Tawfik Johari, finally got noticed for the wrong reasons.

Many MPs were amused when, at one point, the son repeated what the father said and the father repeated what the son said.

The screaming match lasted about 40 minutes.

Only Muar MP Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman showed class and decorum and, more importantly, asked the right questions - what has happened to principles and the promise to fight corruption?

Syed Saddiq is now the linchpin



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Analysis

to laws that require a two-thirds majority to pass and he has pledged to support legislation to separate the powers of the Attorney General and the executive arm of the government.

But the red card, as they say in football, goes to Putrajaya MP Datuk Dr Radzi Jidin.

The fracas erupted shortly after Anwar started to explain why the discharge not amounting to an acquittal (DNAA) was granted to Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Apparently, Radzi had sort of scoffed and laughed out loud when Anwar denied that he had interfered in the matter, prompting the Prime Minister to retort that the Putrajaya administration had "done it" although it was unclear what he meant by that exactly.

Radzi, who thought the remark was aimed at him as the MP for Putrajaya, seemed to go berserk, stunning even his own Perikatan

Nasional side.

His hysterical performance has been trending on social media.

"It was like someone took away his candy," said political commentator Ivanpal S. Grewal.

Radzi later told his Perikatan, friends he had gone in to fight but lost his cool because he "does not like to listen to lies".

An aide to a government MP said people have made up their minds about the DNAA issue and it is not easy to bury it.

"But what happened to the senior MPs? They just sat there instead of defending the PM. The dilemma was written on their faces," said the aide.

It was an awful episode and Anwar's face was flushed as he emerged from the House to go to his car.

Former Selangor exco member Datuk Teng Chang Khim said Pakatan Harapan's most potent weapon - the fight against corruption - is in tatters.

"But all is not lost, Pakatan can still show that it can run a clean government, no hanky-panky.

"The PM also has to work extra hard on the economy and control inflation and the cost of living.

"Economic issues are critical and if the foreign investments do not materialise, the DNAA will continue to haunt the government," said Teng.

The unity government needs to move quickly because the next

general election could be as soon as three years away if the government intends to synchronise the federal election with that of Johor, Melaka and the other states.

The Prime Minister's explanation on the DNAA did not offer anything new on why the prosecution chose to back off.

The public wants to know the "cogent reasons" cited by the Attorney General's Chamber.

In this regard, the newly set-up Committee on Human Rights, General Elections and Institutional Reforms may shed some light on the issue.

It is headed by Selangor MP and lawyer William Leong, who is one of the few good men left in politics.

Leong plans to call former attorney general Tan Sri Idrus Harun as well as new Attorney General Datuk Terrirudin Mohd Salleh to give their side of the story.

"We also want to hear about the 11 cogent reasons to better understand the situation. The truth must come out for there to be closure," said Leong.

The committee is also looking into the possibility of an independent Attorney General's Chamber.

At the moment, it is both the adviser to the government as well as the public prosecutor, giving rise to conflict of interest and the perception of interference.

"It's a massive task and we are inviting lawyers, experts and NGOs to give their views. Come out of your armchair and speak to us," said Leong.

Ahmad Zahid felt the heat and was conspicuously missing that stormy afternoon in Parliament.

The issue has hurt Umno and dealt a blow to the image of Pakatan.

Calls within Umno for Ahmad Zahid to resign as the president have died away but the ferocity of the exchange in Parliament showed that it does not take much to exploit political sentiments surrounding the Deputy Prime Minister.

Anwar said he is aware of being labelled a hypocrite and accused of selling out his principles.

He said that even his friends are not happy about the DNAA decision, but he is committed to standing by the man, who helped him arrive in Putrajaya.

"Zahid will remain an issue which the Opposition will milk for what it's worth or at least until a new issue crops up.

"The thing is that there isn't anyone in Umno, whom the PM trusts more than Zahid, but if Anwar wants to save himself, he needs to find a soft landing for his friend," said Ivanpal.

The views expressed here are entirely the writer's own.