

'Ask not what M'sia can do for you'

This National Day, the writer asks fellow citizens to think of what they can do for the country.

WITH National Day coming up on Saturday, I thought I would share my own personal pledge to help this beleaguered nation of ours and how I came to develop it.

I voted for the first time in 1990 and then in 1995.

Both of those times, I was proud of my two leaders: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Both of those times, I was proud to be a Malay and a Muslim.

I was proud of my country and had high hopes for the future.

Unfortunately, those hopes were dashed when 1998 came with the sacking of Anwar that showed my leaders and my government in a very bad light, to put it mildly.

Then hope was rekindled in 2018 when Pakatan Harapan made history by interrupting the 60-year reign of Barisan Nasional.

I was again proud, but this time more as a Malaysian. The efforts and dedication of Malaysians from all walks of life and of different races came together to create history (and as far as I was concerned, save the country).

My pride in being a Malay and a Muslim had waned over the last 10 years before the 2018 general election.

Again, the small kindling of hope died in the aftermath of the treacherous Sheraton Move in early 2020 that toppled the Pakatan government.

However, after a tumultuous two years that included the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, hope came in a surprising turn of events and the wisdom of the then Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah.

**MOHD
TAJUDDIN
MOHD RASDI**



Over the top

Anwar became the Prime Minister of an unlikely coalition.

Many thought that this coalition would not last. But it did.

And now, Anwar, the unity government, and I will celebrate a second National Day. The first one last year was a bit shaky, but after the recent Nenggiri by-election in Kelantan, hope seems to have brightened a bit.

The Malays have a saying, "Tepuk tangan bukan sebelah", perhaps almost equivalent to the English saying "It takes two to tango". What it means is that any endeavour, good or bad, takes more than one party.

Thus, for this National Day, I pledge to help our country in ways that the unity government and Anwar may not be able to.

Despite control of vast resources of money, people and power, I have seen many things now that would render a good government helpless. A bad government would not find any problem prospering in any situation because its aim is always "all for one and one will take all".

Now, how can I help my country? How can one person make a difference and affect change to help his government and a leader in whom he still trusts?

What was it that John F. Kennedy said in the United States? "Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country." Because, my dear fellow Malaysians, it takes two to tango to rebuild our nation.

Firstly, I have seen how much of a toll narrow-minded clerics, silent muftis, conservative professors and ignorant influencers have taken on Islam, so I began a YouTube channel of my own to offer a different view of Islam.

Having read so many books and scriptures for my academic career as well as my own personal faith, I share my thoughts on YouTube in an effort to spark understanding in a few Malays and help make a few Malaysians of other faiths and beliefs feel relatively safe living here.

I am sure Anwar knows more about Islam than me, but if he responds to the extreme agitators and their ignorant followers, it will be turned into political ping-pong and he will be accused of being a "liberal", and thus, a destroyer of Islam. Anwar needs the votes to stay in power to affect change. I do not need any vote at all so I can say what I need to.

Many of my YouTube videos and writings in the media are of that nature, explaining Islam both to Muslims and non-Muslims.

I thought that this would be my main role; as I said in one article in 2018, Islam will be the battleground for Malaysia in the next election and beyond.

I was right, and that was what happened - and is happening - with the weaponising of religion to win parliamentary seats.

But now, suddenly and out of the blue, a new "enemy" has come

to the fore, threatening to destroy Malaysia's future.

Sadly, it is the civil society fighters who were instrumental in standing up to the previous regime for 20 years. The same people now seem to have turned against Anwar because Anwar is "colluding" with the enemy, Umno, and they prefer Umno out of the government entirely.

But this simple-minded reaction would ultimately destabilise the unity government within a month because there are king-maker parties that would deal with any party that promises them the moon and the sun for their own use.

The fact that an ousted Umno would have no choice but to form a single Malay bloc with PAS and Bersatu is also being ignored - the implications of that is unthinkable.

Then there is the criticism that Anwar is playing the Malay and Muslim hero with pay hikes for the (largely Malay) civil service, Palestinian support and making only lame efforts at curbing extremist politicians.

In reaction, I use my YouTube channel to explain that politics is not like going to the supermarket and getting what you want simply because you have the money to buy everything. Politics is about winning over the majority race, like it or not.

Politics is also about when to say or do something at the right time, in the right tone and to the right audience. Whether a leader intends to do good or do evil, be magnanimous or be selfish, the right optics must always be present. I have come to understand this undeniable element of poli-

tics in the last 10 years.

Unfortunately, civil society personalities love to shoot from the hip, often without full knowledge of an issue, with no care for its religious or political implications and no sense of strategic political considerations.

It would be a sad irony indeed if these Good Samaritans end up being the real destroyer of this nation instead of the extremists.

For this National Day on Saturday, I ask my fellow Malaysians to think about what you can do to rebuild this country.

With Anwar and the unity government, I personally think this is a window of opportunity. Those who gripe at everything this government has done never seem to have any solutions or alternative leaders to offer, so I suggest we don't listen to them.

Instead, I pledge what I can do.

And if all of us pledge the same and have some trust in the current leadership to change Malaysia for the better, we can start moving somewhere.

Yes, there are still some voices in the unity government that sound like the old regime, but remember, politics is 10% substance (good or bad) and 90% optics, strategy and opportunities.

We can play this game of optics too if we care to think and speak with consideration, rather than rant and complain like children.

Prof Dr Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi is Professor of Architecture at the Tan Sri Omar Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Studies at UCSI University. The views expressed here are entirely the writer's own.