

**'I want Najib to win, Anwar not fit to be PM'**  
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**WHENEVER Tun Daim Zainuddin is not orbiting the globe, he will be holed up in his workstation at Wisma YPR (Yayasan Pok Rafeah, named after his late mother).**

His desk is one sprawling clutter of printouts and financial analyses helpfully sent daily by an organisation headed by a friend -- a former prime minister of a neighbouring Asian country.

The hallway is in a different galaxy. It is virtually an art gallery. He owns more than 2,000 paintings. Some paintings are now worth 10 times what he paid for. He was chairman of the National Art Gallery before he joined the cabinet. The lawyer-turned-housing developer who later became finance minister (twice) is not selling.

The range of passions is bewildering. He is a fan of Datuk Shah Rukh Khan. Daim is a significant shareholder of a bank with many branches in Africa. He is chairman of the AFC (Asian Football Confederation) audit committee.

At 74, he plays badminton with increasingly younger mates. And, he displays a Manchester United replica jersey autographed by Sir Bobby Charlton.

"I am a busybody," he explained as he greeted New Straits Times journalists -- A. JALIL HAMID, RASHID YUSOF and HARIZ MOHD -- and photographer, ZAHARI ZAKARIA, to kickstart a series of exhaustive interviews.

Daim, who had precipitated a near-crash of the stock market in 1994 with his "sell" advice and later named "chief conspirator" by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, has since sparked a media frenzy for a new reason.

It is political punditry, having correctly predicted the outcome of the March 2008 general election; so the NST prodded him for new predictions. We probed his political allegiance and provoked him even as the sessions shifted focus from one hot topic to another.

By the time we were done, newer perspectives and insights had been gleaned from the political events of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the future of Umno, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Anwar, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Lee Kuan Yew, to the rise of China and the Arab Spring (which he jokingly referred to as "the Arab Fall").

The resultant Qs and As will run in two parts. This instalment deals mostly with the immediate political questions.

"If you ask me, between the two, Najib or Anwar, I would choose Najib."

The second half of the interview, which will be published tomorrow, discusses, among others, key events in the "Mahathir Years".

**Question: Tun, since your retirement, you have given a number of interviews to the Chinese dailies, but hardly any to the mainstream media. Any particular reason for this?**

Answer: I have been asked to give so many interviews, but all they wanted to know is when will the elections be held and what is my prediction of the outcome. So, before the election, which I predict will be by next month (he laughs), this will be my last interview.

I don't want to give any more interviews because all of you only ask about the elections and it's quite tiresome.

Also, I don't want people to misquote me. I heard people say that I had said BN would win only three states. That is not true. You must read my answers in full. I said BN, in particular Umno, must work hard, stay united and put up the best candidates to win.

Yes, I have given interviews to Chinese press mostly. The Chinese wanted to understand the thinking of the Malays. To address their concerns, I must know what is in their minds, their fears and their aspirations and they wanted to know if our economic policies are right. They want peace in the country and they know to have peace, you need political stability.

Have you read their articles on government policies? Someone will whisper to the government about this or that paper, or that this writer is being anti-establishment.

I say, "Stop!" I have read their articles. While they do criticise, they are not being anti-establishment. You argue with facts and statistics. The process will produce a healthy debate.

**Question: So, for you, being critical does not mean one is anti-establishment. Are you also saying that the pattern of voicing out may not necessarily cost Barisan Nasional votes?**

Answer: Precisely. That is my central argument. I have always advocated a robust debate. Over the years, I personally do find certain policies objectionable, but I am still a supporter of the government as there are more good policies than bad.

For the rest of the nation, if you disagree with government policies, yes, go ahead and criticise, but constructively. I would fear more for the country if people gave up and didn't care. I believe that it is only when you care that you want things to be for the better, that you voice out. A passive passionless society will be a disaster for the country.

**Question: Still on politics associated with the Chinese community, parallels had been drawn between DAP and PAP (People's Action Party). Is this a fair comparison?**

Answer: I don't think there is much of a relationship.

I think Lee Kuan Yew does not have much respect for DAP's leadership. The quality is not there. Earlier on, yes, when they had a branch here, when Devan Nair was here, and Zain Azahari joined the PAP. Zain is still around and practises law. I think there were many intellectuals who joined the PAP. That would be the crowd who would follow Kuan Yew.

The PAP is more intelligent and more calculating, very suave in their approach. The DAP is really a Chinese party. It's not a multiracial party. It's chauvinistic, but claims to be Malaysian Malaysia.

You can see in its last party election, members don't want even a single Malay to be in the top leadership.

This is very clear. That is their idea of Malaysian Malaysia. Whatever their leadership may claim, their members are their main drivers.

Pas has similar problems.

When the issue of kalimah Allah cropped up, the leadership thought they could simply follow the lead taken by Anwar. But the grassroots responded by rejecting the stand of its leadership. And the Majlis Syura also said "no".

If the Chinese don't understand this, they will be sorely mistaken when push comes to shove.

### **Question: What about Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)?**

Answer: PKR has always been a one-man show. Its history is a party fighting for Anwar. They are former Umno members. Later, some liberals joined them, taken in by the rallying call of justice and fairness, but it's just pure "sloganeering". It is actually fighting just for one man, not even for justice. Who have they fought for? What cause have they pursued? See the stand on Palestine. It is a question of justice and humanitarian cause. They support Israel.

### **Question: And Pakatan Rakyat?**

Answer: When you are elected to Parliament, you debate in Parliament. We do it in a civilised way. We elect people and we address them as "The Honourable Member". PKR is a party born from the streets. So, it will always return to the streets. That is their culture. So, you can see demonstrations in the streets organised, or supported by them. Pas was never like that. The DAP was never like that.

Anwar had repeatedly said there would be Arab Spring-like demonstrations should Pakatan lose in the next general election because of what they deem as "cheating".

He has set the stage to justify their losses if they lose in the next general election.

Pakatan is prepping the people so that they can scapegoat the government and the Election Commission.

First, we are not an Arab country. And second, if there is rigging in previous general elections, how did Pakatan win five states in 2008?

Arab Spring has turned out to be Arab Fall (for the lack of a unifying leadership and instability it has induced).

**Question: Arab Fall?**

Answer: You should read the history of Egypt under King Farouk, then only can you understand the mood and feelings at the time of the coup in 1952.

I visited Egypt at the end of my studies in the late 1950s and it saddens me how these freedom fighters had failed to run their countries successfully.

They had failed to raise the standard of living of their people and during my last visit a few years back, there's still the same poverty.

You must read Gamal Abdul Nasser's Revolt of the Nile. It is a small book but it has frightened the West that they compared him with Hitler. We are not from the Arab World. You must understand the background of the Middle East, why it is not happening and will not happen here in the East.

You want deaths in our streets? You want to see bloodshed? (Pan Arab nationalism dated back to July 1952 when Gamal, a colonel in the Egyptian army, led his secret group "Free Officers" to overthrow King Farouk 1, who was the king of Egypt and Sudan.

(His successful revolt was made an example by several other military officers in the Arab world to dethrone their monarchs, including Iraqi General Abd al-Karim Qasim in 1958 (the coup against the Hashemite monarchy) and Libyan Muammar Gaddafi, who led a group of young military officers, to overthrow King Idris 1 in 1969.)

**Question: What of Malaysian politics and the changing geopolitical landscape and events elsewhere?**

Answer: China and Japan had demonstrated their qualities as genuine friends of this country at the height of the Asian Financial Crisis.

China decided not to devalue its currency, while Japan handed Malaysia a US\$5 billion (RM15.6 billion) soft loan. Its then vice-finance minister Eisuke Sakakibara told me not to tell the Americans of the gesture.

The United States did not want to help us, for reasons too numerous to enumerate here.

Anwar has this tendency of toeing the American line.

If anything happens to Malaysia's economy, the US and European countries, whose economies are falling apart, would not bother to help.

If we keep toeing the American line, what would our friends think? They were the ones who helped us, while the US tried to sink us.

China is now the second largest economy and it is growing.

President Barack Obama has quickly visited Myanmar and tilted his foreign policy towards the Pacific, which is about balancing the influence of China.

There is already an economic crisis now in Europe, the US and Japan.

China, India, Brazil and Russia all are slowing down; we must not have the wrong team to manage the economy.

The danger here is somebody with no experience, who has shown no capability of handling the last crisis. There is going to be a big danger that we may go down. And nobody is going to help us. Because the US, their good friend, and Europe will not be helping us. They are in trouble themselves.

It is dangerous if Pakatan under Anwar is to lead the country. I am worried as he does not have the depth in economy, always needed people to tell him -- what to think and what to do.

So far, there has not been even one significant idea from Anwar as the economic adviser to the Selangor government.

Worse, Selangor has badly handled its water issue, which had dismayed developers, investors and the people. Of course, they will blame everything on the Federal Government despite the fact the Langkat 2 water project was planned before they came to power in the state.

Why doesn't he become economic adviser to Kelantan and Kedah if Pakatan believes he is good? Think seriously. Think of our future.

**Question: Anwar believes that he is destined to become the next prime minister.**

Answer: Well, destiny is an act of God. You can be only one heartbeat away from that post but man proposes, God disposes. I think God still loves Malaysia (smiles).

**Question: What are BN's chances in the general election? Will it be able to secure a two-thirds majority?**

Answer: There you go again, the election questions. Well, I would say Barisan will win. It is good that the government (BN) thinks it can get a two-thirds majority. That should be their target.

Umno has about 3.3 million members, MCA about one million and MIC, about 600,000. That's already about half of the voters. Now, you only need some support from the fence-sitters, you should then be able to win. But BN must put new and clean candidates who are acceptable to voters.

But before BN can win, there must be unity within the coalition. If they are not united, Pakatan will do better. That's what happened in 2008.

Stay united, be loyal and don't sabotage. We need a steady and experienced hand. Only BN has the experience.

We have gone through crisis after crisis, and recovered very quickly. We have to tell the Chinese that we cannot experiment. Look at Japan. Look around us. Look at Britain. Study what is happening.

**Question: Personally, do you want to see Najib win this election?**

Answer: If you ask me, between the two, Najib or Anwar, I would choose Najib. I will give Najib the chance. Give him the mandate and see whether he delivers because Anwar has had his chances, but he blew them.

I want Najib to win because I don't think Anwar is the right candidate to be prime minister.

I believe he will mess up the country by getting advice from the likes of the IMF (International Monetary Fund), World Bank and Wolfowitz (Paul Wolfowitz, former World Bank president).

I will support Najib, but he must fight corruption and crime, strengthen the nation's security and review the education system. Make English compulsory in all national schools. Without English, we are dead, especially the Malays. The Malays must realise, without English they cannot compete. We must insist on English as a second language.

It was not a mistake to change the medium of instruction from English to Bahasa Malaysia. It is the language of the nation and of unity. If we don't speak the same language, how do we understand one another?

The mistake was in the policies which were to promote Bahasa Malaysia, it had to be at the expense of English. We should not have to kill English to make Bahasa Malaysia the lingua franca of the country.

If possible, we should learn Arabic, because the rich Arab countries will be where the money comes from.

On the nation's security, every day in the media and on television, there are news reports of murder and crime. You say our country is safe, but if people don't feel safe, they will not believe you regardless of the statistics.

On corruption, tell the rakyat that the government is serious in wanting to get rid of it. But it cannot do it alone, it needs the rakyat's help. Raise the awareness of rakyat on the evils of corruption and get schools involved in it. Educate the students. If the government and rakyat work together, we can succeed. It is a two-way thing. The government alone cannot fight corruption. People must be clean and honest. Don't just blame the government. Tepuk sebelah tangan tak berbunyi. If people are honest and clean, the government, too, can be clean. The government must come down strongly on those who are corrupt.

**Question: The pledges and promises Najib made, are they good for the country?**

Answer: Give Najib a chance. Five years. Test him. Give him the mandate. He is doing a fairly good job. Let's see him deliver and continue with his transformation policies.

Najib should reshuffle the cabinet. Bring in new faces. People think he is carrying too much deadwood in the cabinet. Most are already past their use-by date.

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