

End divisive race and religion rhetoric

MALAYSIA certainly deserves better than the race and religion rhetoric fanned by several figures who are using social media as their platform.

Race and religion have long been the most combustible elements in politics – easily ignited, difficult to extinguish and devastating when weaponised.

We are now seeing troubling signs that these fault lines are once again being exploited, not as expressions of genuine concern, but as calculated tools to discredit Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his government.

These narratives have become louder and more frequent as part of a run-up general election campaign against the government.

The controversy surrounding unregistered Hindu temples illustrates how a single issue can be spun into two conflicting narratives – both designed to inflame emotions and erode confidence in the administration.

On one side, a campaign has emerged portraying Anwar as weak in defending Malay-Muslim interests while non-Muslims perceive him as not acting against the serial Muslim convert provocateurs.

The narrative against him is simple but dangerous: the Madani government, in particular Pakatan Harapan, needs to be replaced in the next general election.

Social media posts, *ceramah* rhetoric and selective reporting suggest that the government is bending over backwards to appease minorities while neglecting the sensitivities of the Muslim majority.

The game plan against him is that Islam is under threat, Malays are losing ground and the government cannot be trusted to protect them.

The language used by several high-profile personalities is harsh, inciting and emotionally charged. The comments towards these posts are worse as they are seditious and hidden behind anonymous accounts.

If words like *“pendatang”* were used previously, social media is now filled with derogatory words like *“kicap”*.

On the other side, Hindu communities – understandably

distressed by incidents of self-appointed vigilantes demolishing or threatening small temples – are being led to believe that the government is indifferent to their fears, or worse, complicit through inaction.

Images of destroyed shrines circulate widely, fuelling anger and anxiety that minority rights are being trampled. They have demanded to know why these self-appointed vigilantes are allowed to demolish places of worship even if they are unregistered.

Shouldn't it be the job of the local governments and police?

The result is a dangerous pincer movement: Malays are told the government is too soft on minorities while minorities are told it is too hard on them. Both narratives cannot simultaneously be true, yet both are gaining traction because they appeal to deeply rooted insecurities.

It is hard to explain or rationalise with many, regardless of their religions, why no one can simply put up a place of worship without permit or sit on someone's land. That is simply unlawful.

On the other hand, neither can anyone set out to destroy a place of worship on the assumption that the local authorities have not acted or that it is too costly to seek a court order, so they have to act themselves.

These disturbing actions do not appear to be accidental; they reflect a sophisticated political strategy – to manufacture the perception of failure regardless of what the government actually does.

If authorities act against illegal structures, they are accused of targeting minorities and if they hesitate, they are accused of betraying the majority.

What makes the situation particularly volatile is the involvement of non-state actors – vigilante groups or personalities who claim to defend religion but operate outside the law.

The last thing we want is for the police to face orchestrated condemnations that they are slow in acting against these culprits. Their actions create flashpoints that force the government into reactive mode. Every demolition, confrontation

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or viral video becomes a political ammunition.

There is no quick fix to the issue of unregistered temples. Malaysia's legal framework on places of worship is complex and often poorly understood. Many small temples, especially in urban areas, were built decades ago on land that has since changed ownership or zoning status.

Resolving such issues requires negotiation, relocation plans and sensitivity – not sledgehammers, literal or rhetorical.

Anwar's long-standing message of reform, inclusivity and multiracial governance makes him particularly vulnerable to such attacks.

He is the first prime minister from a multiracial party to lead a unity government and has only held the helm for three years.

But a perfect storm is brewing ahead of the elections to ensure that PKR will have to hand over the reins to race-based or religious-based parties.

To hardliners, moderation is suspicious. To cynics, unity is naive. And to those who thrive on division, harmony is bad for business.

But Malaysians should ask a crucial question: Who benefits from heightened distrust between communities? It is certainly not ordinary citizens, who must live, work and raise families together. Nor is it businesses, investors or young

people hoping for a stable future.

The beneficiaries are those who gain political mileage from chaos – those who find it easier to win support by stoking fear than by offering solutions.

The real test is not whether one community “wins” over another but whether the rule of law prevails over mob action and whether political leaders refuse to exploit divisions for short-term gain.

Malaysia's strength has always been its ability to manage diversity through negotiation, rather than confrontation. Allowing provocateurs – political or otherwise – to dictate the national conversation risks undoing decades of careful balance.

The danger today is not simply that Anwar's government may be made to look bad. It is that the country itself may be made to look fractured, intolerant and perpetually on edge – a narrative far more damaging than any single political setback.

Now is not the time for more manufactured race and religion divisions but for us to come together to face a bigger challenge – the war in West Asia and its far-reaching impacts on our cost of living as Malaysians. – Bernama

Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai is the chairman of Bernama and a National Journalism Laureate. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com