

What it will take for everyone to be able to afford school in the US?

The US education system is radically unfair and Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are sparking a conversation about alternatives

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Last week's Democratic debate was more of a brawl than a discourse. Seeing anti-billionaire candidates Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren pitted against billionaire Michael Bloomberg made me consider the wealth disparity in America. The question that came out of the debate was: how ready is America ready for socialism?

I would not call either Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren socialists, even if conservative Republicans are eager to paint them with that brush.

Ms Warren is more a pro-market leftist than a socialist. Born into poverty, she has fought hard all her life to reach the position she is in now. She calls herself a capitalist to the bones.

Brooklyn-born Mr Sanders on the other hand is a self-declared socialist who in 1985 travelled to Nicaragua to celebrate the Soviet-backed Sandinista government and four years later, to communist Cuba to laud the country's free healthcare, education and housing.

He has recently toned down his rhetoric. He no longer idolises communist regimes but looks to progressive countries like Denmark and Sweden as examples of workable socialism - in particular their health and education policies. Both he and Ms Warren intend to fix America's broken education system.

I have lived in socialist countries (France and the UK) most of my adult life. I have used

state healthcare, given birth in a public hospital and my son went to a "sous-contrat" school in Paris that was subsidised by the French government.

While there are problems with the French system - including often enforcing memorisation rather than creative thinking - it largely works. Most people in France use the state system rather than private schools, and universities are accessible to most if you get the grades.

No massive economic hurdles or crippling student loans prevent youngsters from attending - or staying - in tertiary education.

In comparison, Mr Sanders and Ms Warren have forced me to think about how radically unfair the US educational system is. In New York City, where I now live, private schools offering elite education cost about \$50,000 (Dh183,660) a year. Students are rigorously prepared to enter the elite Ivy League universities - which then cost around \$80,000. Nowhere is economic injustice more apparent than within the educational model.

To be fair, the wealthier the university the more financial aid it is able to give. Others can attend public universities - which have fewer resources. Ms Warren got financial aid and worked her way through law school. Mr Sanders went to the public Brooklyn College before transferring to the University of Chicago.

The New York City private school system has exploded since the financial boom of the



Lily Barbour, 5, holds up a campaign sign for Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bern

1980s, with competitive parents plotting their child's high school from their day of birth. This is a new phenomenon. Prior to the money boom most people just went to school.

One 1983 graduate of Dalton, one of the best elite schools in New York, recently told me that it was very different three decades ago: "In my day, people's parents were teachers or journalists or maybe lawyers - the average middle class. Now most parents are bankers."

It is frustrating to think that a level of superior education is only available to elite students - either because they have money or are groomed to

Mr Sanders believes we should "re-invest" in education, and use the first African-American Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall as an icon - his plan largely focuses on combating racism, free universal school meals and rebuilding schools.

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SULAIMAN HAKEMY

If a week is a long time in politics - as the former UK prime minister Harold Wilson once observed - then Malaysia has just demonstrated how much can happen in only three days.

The reformist government that was elected two years ago has collapsed. An alternative ethnic Malay-dominated coalition that would have dented Malaysia's reputation as a multicultural, multi-faith country has been proposed instead. Moreover, the prospect of Malaysia evolving into an issues-based democracy, instead of one dominated by personalities and intrigue has suffered a devastating setback.

From May 2018 until his shock resignation on Monday, Malaysia was ruled under a coalition government by Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who also served as prime minister from 1981 to 2003.

Dr Mahathir's most recent tenure in office was initially meant to be a caretaker government while his protege and designated successor, Anwar Ibrahim, awaited release from prison a royal pardon for a sodomy conviction.

The relationship between Dr Mahathir and Mr Anwar, however, has long been fraught and complicated, and many believe

that the former is resisting attempts to hand power to the latter.

Last Friday, the presidential council of Dr Mahathir's Pakatan Harapan (PH) party met to discuss a plan for the prime minister to step down and make way for Mr Anwar, who leads the People's Justice Party (PKR), to finally take office.

By the end of Monday, however, PH's coalition government had fallen apart. One party left and another splintered - hoping to form a new government by allying with the main opposition parties. Dr Mahathir had been assumed to be behind the move, not least because the party that left - Bersatu - was set up as his own vehicle to return to politics. But he refuted the claims, handed in his resignation to Malaysia's king in protest and left his own party for good measure.

As the dust is settling, two things are clear.

Whereas previously, many were pressuring 94-year-old Dr Mahathir to set a date for his departure quickly, suddenly it appears that every MP from every party wants him to remain prime minister, and mostly for as long as he wants.

Moreover, Mr Anwar's chances of succeeding him are looking slimmer than ever.

Many will see the current political turmoil solely through



Mahathir Mohamad handed in his resignation to Malaysia's King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, centre, in protest and left his own party for good measure.

the Mahathir-Anwar lens. The pair's relationship goes back to 1982, when Dr Mahathir was a newly-minted prime minister and brought Mr Anwar, then a firebrand youth leader, into the government he headed at the time, under the Barisan Nasional (BN) party.

Mr Anwar advanced swiftly through the ranks, becoming

a minister the following year, finance minister in 1991 and deputy prime minister in 1993. Five years later, though, he was sacked from all his posts and later convicted of sodomy and corruption.

Mr Anwar's supporters claimed the charges were inflated, and the sodomy conviction was later reversed. Partisans

of Dr Mahathir have claimed that Mr Anwar, although by that time already designated the former's successor, was impatient and was trying to force his mentor from office. They point out further that he was convicted in the first instance and therefore guilty as charged.

In the two decades afterwards, Mr Anwar led a new

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