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A sorry statement of an apology

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I REFER to the report in the New Straits Times of March 14, 1997, headlined, "Kuan Yew apologises unreservedly - Dr Mahathir to consult Cabinet on whether to pursue the matter further".

Having read the "unreserved apology" on page two of the newspaper that same day, I believe you were too kind to consign it there.

It is a sorry statement of an apology; not a statement of apology.

Surely the scurrilous statements about Johor demand nothing less than an unequivocal retraction of them and an unreserved apology, and not only from Lee Kuan Yew personally but also from his son, Lee Hsien Loong, personally.

Consider first the author of the statement.

It is by the Press Secretary to the Senior Minister. It is not signed by Kuan Yew.

As stated in the Press Secretary's statement and indeed in the affidavit, Kuan Yew made the statement in a sworn affidavit dated Jan 27, 1997 "for (himself) and on behalf of the 2nd Plaintiff (Lee Hsien Loong) who has duly authorised (him)".

The scurrilous statements are, therefore, as much Lee Hsien Loong's, who is, among other things, the First Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, as they are Kuan Yew's.

Both Kuan Yew and son should come out with a statement, not his Press Secretary. They did not make the scurrilous statements through the Press Secretary. They made it themselves.

If they could condescend to make a declaration in writing upon oath before a person authorised to administer oaths (a simple dictionary definition of "affidavit" so we may know what it is and to better appreciate the gravity of Kuan Yew and son's scurrilous statements) why, if he now wants to "apologise unreservedly for the offence he has caused", could he and his son not issue a statement signed by the both of them or by Kuan Yew personally and on behalf of his son?

Consider next the tone of the Press Secretary's statement.

The introductory paragraph paints a picture of one high in the clouds being disturbed by reports that the peasants below are unhappy by some pronouncements that the one on high has made: "Senior Minister (Lee Kuan Yew) has been informed of the concerns expressed..."

I am not privy to the aide memoire given to the Acting High Commissioner of Singapore but I am sure it must have conveyed not only concerns but great displeasure and a demand for a retraction and an apology.

Consider further the tenor and thrust of the text. Out of the seven paragraphs, five are devoted to explaining Kuan Yew and son's scurrilous statements.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was right in describing the Press Secretary's statement as an "excuse".

And I suggest that in giving the excuse, the statement added insult to injury.

Consider the excuse. The scurrilous statements were not meant for the public; Kuan Yew did not ask for it to be made public; it was the judge "who ordered open court hearings..."; and "Tang also asked for an open court hearing..."; and "it was unfortunate that subsequently it became public by the way the litigation developed".

Kuan Yew is a lawyer by training and vocation before he became a

politician and lauded as a statesman by the Press. His thoughts and views about the future and the coming millennium for Southeast Asia, nay for Asia, nay for the world, are sought by the Press, presidents and prime ministers with the exception of Malaysia's, I am sure.

Are we now to understand that this same Kuan Yew and his brilliant son did "not anticipate..." that "the affidavit would (now) be discussed in open court..." and "...has now been reported in the Press"?

And what are we to make of paragraph five of the excuse?

Surely all it means is that had Kuan Yew anticipated that it would become public, he would have tried to prevent his sworn scurrilous remarks from being made public.

We need not dwell on how successful he would have been to keep the affidavit within the confines of the chambers of the Singapore court.

Are we to understand that we should feel good because Kuan Yew "would have tried to get his counsel not have this affidavit taken into open court"? And so that we would not have known of their scurrilous statements until perhaps Kuan Yew and son are dead and gone?

In short, it was not that Kuan Yew and son's scurrilous statements were unfortunate or that Kuan Yew and son regret making the scurrilous statements but that the scurrilous statements became public!

Kuan Yew and son are no fools, as my perception of Kuan Yew and son based on reports I have read of them in the Press suggest.

We should not allow them to make fools of us by accepting the statement.

Kuan Yew and son probably consider it another brilliantly crafted statement, this time to appease the peasants and giving nothing away.

The statement intended as an apology is an obnoxious composition masquerading as an apology and not worth the paper it was written on.

I urge that it be rejected.

In libel, the party wronged by the libellous remarks is entitled to demand the wordings, terms and conditions of the apology to be tendered by the party committing the wrong.

I urge that Malaysia should not accept anything less from Lee Kuan Yew and Lee Hsien Loong other than a public statement addressed to the Government and people of Malaysia, signed by both of them, and containing the following:

1. An acknowledgement by them that the scurrilous remarks were baseless and that they are withdrawn unequivocally and without qualification;
2. An undertaking by them to apply to the relevant Singapore court to expunge the scurrilous remarks from the affidavit dated Jan 27 1997, and
3. An unqualified apology with an undertaking that they will not make such scurrilous statements.

If such a statement is not forthcoming from Kuan Yew and son, as my perception of them based on reports I have read of them in the Press suggest for they are not known to make wrong statements, Malaysia must be prepared to carefully calibrate its actions to make it abundantly clear to Lee Kuan Yew and Lee Hsien Loong that they are not welcome in Malaysia and that Malaysia will not have any dealings with them.

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