

Mulling over conspiracy theories

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This week has been one of conspiracy theories – starting with a foreign agenda to oust Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and a local one to topple his deputy, Datuk Seri **Anwar** Ibrahim. Putting a stop to these efforts calls for a concerted effort by all concerned, writes SHAMSUL AKMAR.

A GERMAN, a newcomer to Malaysia, argued with a local over the superiority complex of some “white men” when they are in Asian countries.

The man- from Hamburg admitted that some Westerners behaved that way but said that some Asians, including Malaysians, were to blame for perpetuating the situation.

“When I was at the airport **queuing** for Customs clearance, I saw an Asian family’s luggage being thoroughly checked. I was prepared for similar treatment.

“However, as I waited my turn, a Customs officer from another lane waved me over. He asked where I was going and then let me pass without checking my luggage,” said the German, adding that while he felt welcomed he also wondered about the difference in treatment.

Though this incident is an isolated one, it is still beguiling how some Malaysians try to please visi-

West is not bad enough, Dr Mahathir recently revealed a conspiracy to topple the country’s leadership.

The Prime Minister believed that the conspiracy was hatched by the West and supported by certain local leaders.

“If they work with foreigners to bring down the leadership, it is a case of history repeating itself – as what happened to the Malacca Sultanate when a traitor like Raia Mandeliar worked with foreign forces to achieve his aims,” said the Johor leader.

To this, Arzmi said: “This is where Umno members must be prepared to be magnanimous and see things in a bigger perspective, besides refraining from being too engrossed in fights for position and power.

new in the Malay culture, especially in ousting leaders.

The most famous would probably be the one during the Malacca Sultanate where Pateh Pekerma Wijaya managed to bring disrepute to Hang Tuah.

Of more contemporary history was the announcement in Parliament of a grand design to topple certain party leaders. It was made public by Datuk Seri Shahidan Kasim who was then an MP. However, it was never proven.

A former academician said some of these conspiracy theories could have spawned from overactive imagination but were given credence by circumstances and coincidences occurring at the particular time.

“For example, Dr Mahathir had been criticising the Western media of having an agenda to oust him.

“Amid all these, a lecturer decides to let a foreign magazine publish his informal opinion poll about the state of affairs in Malaysia which generally compares Dr Mahathir’s leadership to Anwar’s.”

The question that arises, said the academician, was why there was the need to share the opinion poll with the foreign magazine when even the person conducting the poll admitted to the sampling’s limited representation.

Yet again, the country’s leadership is being pitted against each other, and done through a foreign tool.

Such circumstances do not help efforts to ensure political stability in facing the economic downturn

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tors, especially Western, but not fellow Asians.

Similarly, it is a worrying trend when local political leaders seem to go overboard when it comes to dealing with Western opinions and viewpoints.

Dr Mahathir came out with a scathing remark recently when some Umno leaders decided to parrot slogans peculiar to the West: "To them these slogans (cronyism and nepotism) must be correct as the idea originates from the *orang putih* (white-men)."

Much as Dr Mahathir's detractors may accuse him of being xenophobic, the fact that many Malaysians, especially Malays, are still being mentally shackled is something which should not be brushed aside.

As if unselective aping of the

Merbok Umno division leader Arzmi Hamid believes that the conspiracy began because too many people in Umno wanted to emulate the ways of the foreigners.

"We have our own mould in determining our leadership. We have, for the past four decades since independence, used our own way of choosing our leader and this has worked well," he said.

But an Umno leader from Johor argued that such talk of conspiracy to change the leadership should not be seen in isolation.

"Though we cannot dispute the possibilities of it, we must see the weakening of our system, be it economics or politics. Some quarters within Umno, desperate because of the economic downturn and poor political standing, will blame whoever is at the helm.

In fact, conspiring with foreigners to bring about changes in the Malay leadership is not new.

Remember how Raja Abdullah brought in the British to ensure that he could secure the Perak Sultanate?

His act marked the beginning of British interference in the Malay states and introduction of the British residency system where the resident's advice was an euphemism for directive.

No one can predict whether the recent conspiracy revealed by Dr Mahathir will be successful. What is certain is that if successful, even the local conspirators will not benefit.

While it is justified to worry about foreign-backed conspiracies, history has shown that conspiracies can only succeed if the leadership is weak.

"In 1996, when we adopted the no-contest move for the posts of president and deputy president, the party was calm.

"Why are things so intense this year? Is it because of the run-up to next year's party elections?

"Everyone talks about democracy. Let's not get carried away with it. Let's practise democracy the Malaysia way."

If Dr Mahathir had been chastising local Umno leaders for being agents of foreign efforts to destroy the leadership, Anwar had spoken of a local conspiracy to oust him.

The Deputy Prime Minister referred to the book *50 Dalil Mengapa Anwar Tidak Boleh Jadi PM* (SO Reasons Why Anwar Cannot Become PM) which he said was a conspiracy to smear his image and topple him.

Again, local conspiracies are not

except to reflect that the Malays and Umno are actually dancing to the tune of the Westerners.

It would be easy to blame the West for attempting to interfere in local politics but Umno leaders, members and the Malays should also blame themselves for allowing this to happen.

By the way, Dr Amien Rais, a leading participant of the Indonesian reformation struggle and fight against cronyism and nepotism there, is coming to Kuala Lumpur for a talk next week.

Let us hope this leader of the Muhammadiyah movement would be treated equally by Customs officers as they would a Westerner.

This is because Dr Amien, an Asian, obtained his PhD from the United States which makes him as good, if not better, than the *orang putih*.
