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Beware the foreign trap

A MALAYSIAN, gravely concerned about the flagrantly biased western media reports on the country, hit the nail on the head in a letter to a local newspaper early this month. He said that "international opinion is working overtime to portray Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as an aggrieved underdog bullied by the overbearing might of the Malaysian State."

But he is now "starting to wonder if, in trying to do so, outsiders have lost all sense of proportion and are giving Malaysia exactly the same treatment they accuse the country of meting out to Anwar." This reader is not alone in having such feelings. Some locals would venture to say, however, far from having lost their sense of proportion, the western media and some foreign groups appear to have their own hidden agenda. For instance, a recent report deliberately twisted the facts by insinuating that Malaysia is not using the respite from capital controls to pursue good policies. It alleges that Malaysia "appears more interested in repression" than in economic reform.

Could it be, as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on Wednesday, that these foreigners are out to achieve a specific aim? By mounting an intensive propaganda against the Malaysian Government in the run-up to the trial of Anwar fixed for Nov 2-14 and sending observer groups, purportedly to ensure a fair trial, aren't they exerting pressure? It is clear that they are attempting to put the Malaysian Government and the judiciary on trial with the hope of getting a decision favourable to them. A desperate bid was even made to intimidate the presiding judge earlier this month.

The foreigners out to undermine Malaysia choose to ignore the local situation, in that the country needs peace and order to pursue its economic recovery measures effectively. With the stimulus measures so far, some sectors are already beginning to show encouraging signs of recovery. The country must not be distracted from focusing on its vital economic agenda.

On Anwar's case, time and again the people have been urged not to assemble illegally, to let the due process of the law take its course and let the court decide. But the demonstrations, particularly in the Federal Capital, went on regardless. The organisers and demonstrators are obviously testing the patience of the law enforcers, blatantly ignoring the grave danger of jeopardising public order. Needless to say, business can be disrupted and certainly the public at large is greatly inconvenienced.

Knowing the politically-charged atmosphere surrounding the case and the great interest in it, the judiciary went out of its way to assure the public that judgment will be made without fear or favour. Judge Augustine Paul in issuing the gag order on all relating to Anwar's guilt or innocence is clearly aware of the heavy task before him. This is manifested in his statement that he is acutely aware of the millions of judges out there and justice must not only be done but seen to be done.

Dr Mahathir's advice to Malaysians not to dismiss the economic dimension of politics should be heeded. Undoubtedly, the people do not want to see massive demonstrations and the overthrow of the Government, with many lives lost and much suffering, and the country opened up to unimpeded entry of foreign investors to take control of the companies. We must never fall into the trap set by the nation's detractors.

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