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## Foreign media peddling mass disinformation

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"FOREIGN media must not be allowed to interfere with the domestic politics and policies of Singapore," so says Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

Those who have crossed swords with Kuan Yew know too well the meaning of the statement. They have experienced a swift and ruthless retaliation from him.

From time to time, circulation of foreign newspapers and magazines have been banned or severely restricted, editors and reporters taken to court and even detained under the Internal Security Act.

Foreign reporters and one visiting lecturer had been known to flee Singapore for fear of arrest.

This "hardball" policy obviously works. Foreign media is now very careful about reporting events concerning the island republic. They are careful not to take sides.

On the other hand, across the Causeway in Malaysia, the laissez-faire attitude towards the Press, especially the foreign ones, seems to be the case.

By most accounts, it is a historically factual statement to say that Malaysia, especially under the tenure of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has practised a gracious attitude towards foreign media.

They enjoy wide and free circulation despite the fact that some of them, in particular the Asian Wall Street Journal (AWSJ) and CNBC, which coincidentally are both owned by Dow Jones of the US, have for many years been highly critical of several issues concerning him and the country.

It would appear that instead of being appreciative of his tolerance, the foreign media have on the contrary taken advantage of his liberal attitude and become bold in their attacks on him.

However, even tolerant, magnanimous and liberal people should stand up to protest when foreign media reports tell untruths, become oppressive, subversive, destabilising and with intention to interfere in sovereignty and domestic politics of a nation.

Enough is enough - it is time Malaysia adopts a hard stand on irresponsible foreign media especially those that insist on peddling mass disinformation and sensationalism instead of reporting accurately and in impartial manner.

Those who do so should be banned so that they will lose circulation and advertising revenue.

Malaysian politics is a domestic issue. It is not the business of CNBC or AWSJ to take sides.

However, it is clear that both CNBC and AWSJ have long adopted an adversarial attitude towards Dr Mahathir and have taken the side of his adversaries no matter who they are.

Unsurprisingly, they have in recent times taken Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as their champion.

What is their objective? They are supposed to be in the business of reporting facts to keep their audiences informed.

Instead they have chosen to distort facts because they are no longer impartial.

This leads many Malaysians and non-Malaysians to wonder whether there is another side to their agenda. There are too many instances to suggest that AWSJ has been consistently anti-Mahathir. For example:

\* In the June 12, issue Barry Wain wrote an article headlined "Why doesn't Mahathir bow out". He suggested that Dr Mahathir might suffer the same fate as President Suharto.

\* June 18 issue, a Malaysian citizen working for the paper, Leslie Lopez in his report made the following comments: "Cracks emerge in Mahathir's leadership"...."calls for change are emerging within his own party"... "ordinary Malaysians voice discontent as Finance Minister's clout grows"... "his control over economic policy wavering".

\* AWSJ Sept 25 issue, Barry Wain's article - "Mahathir vs World Opinion".

This article sought to undermine the credibility and desirability of Dr Mahathir in continuing to lead his country. ... "The man who until recently revelled in the role of champion of the Third World is now viewed as just another tyrant".

\* Oct 2 issue, Barry Wain in a report headlined "Apec's November Challenge" questioned the capability of Dr Mahathir in hosting a successful Apec summit.

Other foreign publications have also taken pot-shots at Dr Mahathir every so often. For example:

\* Time magazine June 15 issue - featuring Dr Mahathir on the cover page with an accompanying article which was critical of Dr Mahathir and his management of the economic crisis.

\* Far Eastern Economic Review, June 18 issue - yet another biased view and opinion of Dr Mahathir's Government.

These reporters are obviously biased.

If they keep talking to people who are anti-Dr Mahathir, obviously the comments will be biased.

Why don't these reporters talk to a wider spectrum of people so that they can present a more balanced view?

For example, instead of singing praises for Anwar and hurling criticisms at Dr Mahathir, here are some of the bland facts:

\* The RM100,000 levy on foreigners' purchase of Malaysian properties introduced by Anwar was misguided. Policy flip-flops like this damage external confidence in Malaysian real estate.

\* At the onset of the recent economic crisis, Anwar was still projecting 5-6 per cent growth.

This forecast had to be reviewed downwards every few months until he finally admitted the economy was in fact contracting. Does this prove that he had a good handle on the state of the economy?

\* Cronyism - it is widely known that MRCB Bhd was an Anwar-backed vehicle; Arus Murni was a failed corporate exercise involving a finance company for a close friend of Anwar and there are several other companies involved in the banking industry that are backed by Anwar.

A subsidiary of Lankhorst Bhd of which a close Anwar aide is executive chairman was awarded six Kuala Lumpur International Airport main contract packages.

Anwar's associates also have interests in several big projects such as the RM4 billion KL Sentral (MRCB), the RM3 billion Express Rail Link (Abdul Rahim Ghouse, Penang Umno Youth Chief), the RM4 billion Segari IPP (MRCB and Malakoff), the RM700 million Port Dickson IPP (MRCB), the RM1.1 billion Ipoh-Lumut Expressway (MRCB), the RM120 million IPP Melewa in Sabah and Hospital Support Services project (Realmild).

Anwar was the Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure and Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on KLIA and had a direct say in awarding these contracts. Talk about cronyism!

\* Anwar's finance companies' merger programme is a total failure.

In fact if AWSJ and CNBC bothered to talk to many bankers, they would

have known that most if not all were sceptical and puzzled by this policy.

The urgency is recapitalisation and not merger. Any accountant can verify that merger simply means "adding across" two balance sheets which does not in itself create more capital.

For many months, the Malaysian corporate sector has been highly critical of Anwar's policies and it is curious to note that not a single foreign publication has written an article to report the truth.

\* Anwar's economic policy of tight credit and high interest rates introduced in December last year brought the Malaysian economy to the brink of disaster.

This is irresponsible economic mismanagement. Malaysia's problem is its large domestic debt relative to depreciated asset values.

How can it be good for the economy when credit is suddenly made unavailable and interest rates increased to 20 per cent?

In all sense of fair play, why has AWSJ or CNBC not given acknowledgement to the widely known view that Anwar's tight money policy was wrong.

Say it - because it is true and it is in the interest of impartial and responsible reporting.

After all, several leading economists and even the IMF have acknowledged that tight money policy has been a mistake.

\* CNBC, AWSJ and other western media have criticised Dr Mahathir for introducing capital controls.

You will be very surprised how happy the majority of businessmen are with the present situation.

Ideally, we would like to have no controls but before these measures were implemented, the situation was impossible.

The currency and our stock market were undergoing systematic annihilation by currency traders and hedge funds shorting our currency and our stocks.

Now at least we can plan as the ringgit has been pegged at RM3.80 to the US dollar; business costs are lower as interest rate has dropped sharply and stock market values have gone up 60 per cent to 100 per cent in many cases.

Final part tomorrow

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