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Give these carrion crows no quarter

Mazlan Nordin

PUBLISHED many years ago in an English newspaper was the following startling report:

"At this very moment, someone in France is almost certainly composing a poison-pen letter. It may take the form of a scrawled tirade on a scrap of wrapping paper stuffed under the front door, or a precise and tempered denunciation hot from the word-processor and delivered with the post. Either way, it is intended to hurt."

The French slang for the poison-pen letter writers is corbeaux, or crows.

There are carrion crows in our midst too as highlighted during the current Umno divisional elections and attempts made by unsavoury characters to bring down their enemies with the poison-pen letter.

As the Malay saying goes, "lempar batu sembunyi tangan" (throw the stone and hide the hand).

Reports have been lodged with the police and criticism published in the Malay newspapers.

A commentary in Berita Minggu elaborates on it. Here are some excerpts:

"The anonymous letters are flying here and there. It's now the season for politicking among Malays. The anonymous letter syndrome has been in existence in Umno all the while... in any institution, company or organisation full of Malays, the anonymous letter isn't something unusual.

"It is not just part of the Umno culture. It's a Malay culture. The anonymous letter does not circulate during party elections only. It would appear during normal times also.

"Perhaps it has to do with the character of the Malay who does not want to embarrass his friend or enemy openly.

On the pretext of maintaining decorum they do not speak with frankness.

And even if they do so there is a certain limit. But in an anonymous letter, there is no limit. Anything goes.

"The enemy in the anonymous letter would not know who is vilifying him, and what is despicable is that the writer continues to pretend to be a friend."

In short, the friend is double-faced or talam dua muka, as the Malay saying goes.

Noted then were the criticisms voiced about the poison-pen letters in previous Umno general assemblies by party president, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, then Umno youth leader.

No one, not even a senior minister, is spared by the poison-pen letter writer. The target would be accused of any number of things: adultery, corruption, abuse of power, treachery or betrayal of national, party or corporate interests.

There are insinuations and innuendoes instead of proof.

No smoke without a fire, the sceptics are told.

The motives of the poison-pen writers would be the same as those of the crows in France or anywhere else: jealousy, envy, greed or just plain nastiness.

Reported late last year was a story about a French radio station which once invited listeners to inform on anyone they pleased.

Some 200 calls were received on the first day and among them were allegations about a neighbour committing adultery and a butcher who cheated. There was also the motorist who supplied the number of a car

which had overtaken him and asking others to return the favour.

Once recounted was a study by the respected French newspaper Le Monde.

According to the article, many thousands of French men and women had denounced fellow citizens to the Gestapo during the Nazi occupation of France during World War II.

Commemorated last September in a French village were the deaths of 16 young Jewish refugees betrayed to the Gestapo.

Information on their hiding place, a schoolhouse, was supplied by a villager.

All but one, including a seven-year-old, were gassed and shot in Nazi concentration camps. As the local mayor said after the ceremony: "A curtain of silence had fallen on the town out of shame."

The French magazine, Le Nouvel Observateur, once conducted a poll and among the questions asked was: would you denounce a person you believed to be a Nazi war criminal?

Less than half of the respondents said yes and more than a third said no.

Answering another question, 17 per cent regarded it as their duty to someone suspected of committing a crime. Another 41 per cent replied it would be justified only in special circumstances.

As noted also about the poison-pen writers during the Umno divisional elections, some are well-educated.

The letters are properly written, expertly printed and evenly distributed, all indicating the existence of an organisation.

Evident is that they have no qualms about causing unconscionable suffering.

They are not burdened with shame and are seemingly unconcerned over their sins for committing slander.

If confronted, they would retort "Bukan saya" and point the finger at others.

We understand now why enforcement officers shoot carrion crows in Kuala Lumpur or Malacca.

Or anywhere also.

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