

08/12/1999

BN got its two-thirds and more

Zainon Ahmad

IT seems to be the season for post-mortems. Everyone seems to be calling for it, some are promising it and some are even saying they are already doing it without even being asked. Seems like there is merit in doing it.

Post-mortems used to mean cutting up the body to determine cause of death. It still means that, but a more apt word today for the examination of the cadaver to determine why it became so is "autopsy".

But did anybody or anything die lately in a way mysterious enough to merit all these calls and talk of post-mortems? Some people say something died in Terengganu. It did?! If so, what is so mysterious about it?

They say in Kelantan it was almost badgered to death. A little life is still flickering, but just barely. A post-mortem? Hardly necessary. After all, where is the mystery.

Others use the word "inquiry". Most, however, avoid using it, saying that the word lacks credibility.

Many inquiries have taken place in the past, but because their results are often disclosed long after everyone has forgotten why they were carried out in the first place, not many are really excited about them.

Because of that, some people have come to think of them as nothing more than just a stratagem to mollify and to stall - a stonewalling process. They say that some results are not made public at all.

Maybe they are too harsh in their criticism. They certainly cannot expect the inquiry into a complicated affair such as the plane crash in Tawau to be completed in one year.

After all, we are not like some degenerate society where the people are so violently and brutally demanding that the poor inquirers have to forgo sleep and family life for days.

Someone told me that an old Malay dictionary compiled by some Christian missionaries in the early years of the last century had many euphemisms as meanings to the words listed.

Thus against the word haid (menstruation) was the phrase ampang roboh!

"Post-mortem" means an after-death examination, but today it is generally accepted to mean "analysis" - an analysis of an incident to find out why it happened or, just as important, why it did not happen.

Take for instance what happened in the just-completed general election.

All the Barisan Nasional wanted, in the face of a strong challenge to its grip on power, was to retain its two-thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat. It got it, and more.

Other governments when facing such a strong challenge, would be exultant with just a simple majority.

So why the gloom? Considering the strong challenge mounted by the opposition riding on the wave of anti-government sentiment, kindled by the arrest and trial of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, it could have been worse for the Barisan Nasional.

The Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional leader, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, exuded jubilation and happiness when he talked to the Press at 3am on Tuesday - a few hours after the coalition was returned to power with a thumping two-thirds majority.

Maybe those who are appearing downcast, morose and even penitance are trying to be martyrs of sorts.

They self-flagellate themselves and wail to the world that they are the ones responsible, hoping perhaps, the world will turn around and tell them

"no, no, you are not the one responsible".

But, happily for the ruling coalition, saner views are also being articulated.

Among these were the calls for changes at all levels of the party and also the suggestions to make the selection of candidates transparent.

But the DAP did not lose either. It, in fact, gained even though its two party stalwarts now have no seats to sit on.

It, too, will be conducting a post-mortem to determine why it was rejected in Penang and elsewhere.

Perhaps its need for a post-mortem is more acute than the others. The battle-scarred party fielded 47 candidates, but only 10 were returned. Is it because it was in an alliance with Pas?

Some are saying the party would have fared better had it gone it alone. They say that the party did not benefit from its dalliance with Pas in 1990 and 1995.

Parti Keadilan Nasional will no doubt be conducting a post-mortem too. After all, its fledgling status notwithstanding, it bid for 59 parliamentary seats but won only five.

Is that all the party, which is at the forefront of avenging Anwar, worth?

It was the best chance for Parti Rakyat Malaysia but it still failed miserably.

It vied for just four parliamentary seats but was completely rejected. A post-mortem?

Pas, of course, benefited the most. It saw a window of opportunity (my friend, UKM political scientist Saleha Hasan says Pas saw "a wide door of opportunity") and took it.

It won 27 parliamentary seats, strengthened its hold on Kelantan and captured Terengganu. It vied for 63 parliamentary seats and attempted to also capture Perlis, Kedah, Pahang and Johor.

Such was its ambition and also its overestimation of the Anwar factor. Does it need a post-mortem?

Ostensibly there is no gloom in the Pas camp. The party appears sanguine and is already working in Pahang and touting it as the next domino to fall.

"It would have performed better had it fielded some women candidates," said Saleha.

Be that as it may, Pas now has a big responsibility with its 27 members and as the leading opposition party in the Dewan Rakyat.

Hopefully, it will do a better job of vetting government bills instead of merely playing the role of a filibuster.

Otherwise Mr Lim Kit Siang will be sorely missed.

(END)