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Don't take neighbours for granted

EVERY time Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launches an attack against foreign elements out to manipulate, dominate, dictate, colonise, swindle and rob Malaysia and its people, the Prime Minister is accused of rhetorics. As he told the Umno General Assembly yesterday, each time he criticises the West he would be accused of trying to divert attention away from the problems at home. But what many Malaysians don't realise is that these foreign elements need not be in Europe or America. Closer to home, so-called friends and neighbours across the Causeway have developed a tendency to undermine what this country stands for.

Take the Singapore Business Times' editorial yesterday for instance. Doing an Al Gore, the financial daily has seen it fit to decide on what should be good for Malaysian politics and democracy. Malaysia, the editorial said, would be better off led by a new team in the new millennium. Winning the general elections will not seal Dr Mahathir's legacy because that will only come if he can set the foundations for Malaysia's sustained economic progress in the new millennium under a new team. That will be served best if he allows fresh faces to emerge and new ideas to blossom, said the editorial. It added that "things cannot bode well for its (Malaysia's) future" when the names of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Tan Sri Musa Hitam were being mentioned for a possible return in the Umno leadership. It said the Barisan Nasional coalition has been characterised by component parties which show a very low propensity for renewal. It pointed out that Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik has been at the helm of the MCA since 1986, Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu of MIC since 1980, and that Gerakan has not seen a leadership change for more than a decade. For sure, the Singapore Business Times' editorial can put Al Gore to shame for his performance last November which must now seem flaccid compared with the editorial. If the editors of the newspaper think Malaysians should take kindly to their holier-than-thou views, they are taking their neighbours for granted. They have also over-estimated the process of democracy in their little island. They have chosen to forget that the leaders of the component parties in Malaysia are all elected in free and clean general elections and party elections. Perhaps the majority of Malaysian voters are rural folks but they are not stupid. And most importantly, they have nothing to fear, no "Big Brother" syndrome to scare them into voting for the ruling party. As a result, this country has an Opposition in Parliament; PAS, for example, governs an entire state. Most of the Opposition parties also are led by seasoned and experienced leaders, some for over a decade.

We will remain puzzled by what the Singapore Business Times is trying to achieve. Tengku Razaleigh is right to say that it is improper for the paper to comment on the leadership of this country as it makes them appear as agents trying to incite trouble. People who have such views have motives to disrupt good relations between countries and peoples. Is that what the editorial wanted to achieve, or are they exercising a new-found press freedom where they are free to criticise as long as it's not their own Government? Singapore was governed by Mr Lee Kuan Yew for 31 years, a record that no Malaysian Prime Minister, no MCA, MIC, or Gerakan leaders are likely to match. Perhaps the Singapore Business Times was trying to tell Malaysians not to make the same mistake that Singaporeans did in this department? Malaysians can expect more of such from across the Causeway.

Very recently, on June 2, the Singapore Straits Times also found it fit to question Malaysia's ability to become a professional player in the global market. It accused the Government of holding the illegal Central Limit Order Book (CLOB) issue hostage of local politics. The Malaysian Government hardly responded to that because this country does not wish to be cowed by other people's small-mindedness. But there's a limit to everything, and it is hoped that the editors across the Causeway know theirs. Let the foreigners who tried to do this region in fight their own battle; Singapore and its newspapers do not have to do them any favours.

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