

27/12/1999

## Editorial denigrates the Opposition

Lim Kit Siang

I REFER to your editorial dated Dec 22, 1999 entitled "Death of Decorum" and Letter of the Day (Dec 24) entitled "Time Kit Siang accepted reality" by Albert Kok Wee Choon, Seremban. I also refer to M. Desa's cartoon (Dec 24) on Datuk Fadzil Noor and me.

Maybe I should feel flattered that after being booted out of Parliament, I am now pictured as being even more powerful than at any time when I was an MP for 30 years and parliamentary Opposition Leader for 25 years. But I am not.

The NST editorial used the term "street-brawling" coined by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and other offensive terms like "mob language", "show of muscles", "subverting the parliamentary process and proceedings", "rebel-rousers" and "political whims".

The NST "Letter of the Day" on Friday also used the same intemperate language as the NST editorial two days earlier.

Firstly, let me thank the letter-writer for counting for me the number of media statements/speeches I had made since Nov 30.

In the NST editorial the objective was to denigrate the Barisan Alternatif MPs and create division and distrust between Pas and DAP, but in the "Letter of the Day", the objective was to denigrate the other leaders in the DAP to sow division and distrust among the DAP leadership.

On Monday, Dr Mahathir accused me as being the "mastermind" and "puppet master pulling strings" in Parliament over the walkout by Barisan Alternatif MPs in protest against the abuse of the Constitution and Parliamentary Standing Orders by the unconstitutional convening of the first meeting of the 10th Parliament.

The collective walkout by all the Barisan Alternatif and PBS MPs on Monday was not pre-planned, as although the DAP, Pas and Keadilan MPs had a pre-council meeting on Sunday night, this had not involved the three PBS MPs who also joined in the walkout on Monday.

The collective walkout by all the BA and PBS MPs in the Dewan Rakyat was a spontaneous protest and outrage of the Opposition MPs in their disgust at the Barisan Nasional's arbitrary and high-handed contempt for the Constitution, Parliament and the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in refusing to cancel the parliamentary meeting and convene instead on Dec 29, 1999, so as to comply with the provisions of the Constitution and the Parliamentary Standing Orders as well as in time to approve the contingency finance bill to authorise government expenditures for the first six months of next year until approval of the 2000 Budget.

It is clear from local Press coverage in the past few days that there was indeed a "puppet master" pulling strings, and he was none other than Dr Mahathir himself who was pulling strings to orchestrate an attack on the Barisan Alternatif MPs for staging Monday's walkout and on me for allegedly "masterminding" the walkout.

The editorial, letter to the editor and the cartoon are all very reminiscent of the role played by the mainstream mass media in the eight-day campaign of the 1999 general election in making it the dirtiest election in the nation's 42-year history.

Normally such unethical and irresponsible journalism by the Barisan Nasional-controlled mass media is orchestrated to release their vicious power only during a general election campaign period, and is immediately withdrawn and ended until the next general election campaign four or five

years later.

But now, for the first time in Barisan Nasional history, such a vicious and malicious orchestration of the Barisan Nasional-controlled mass media is being redeployed against the Opposition less than a month after the last general election - which is an eloquent testimony of two things:

- \* Firstly, the Barisan Nasional leadership is aware that it has no leg whatsoever to stand on to justify the convening of the first meeting of the 10th Parliament in utter contempt of the Constitution, Parliament and the Yang di-Pertuan Agong;

- \* Secondly, Umno's sense of weakness, vulnerability and even some desperation despite Barisan Nasional retaining two-thirds parliamentary majority in the Nov 29, 1999 general election.

The general election is over. I would urge an end to one-sided, biased, tendentious and downright dishonest reporting and writing in the Malaysian mass media and a return to decent, responsible and civilised journalism.