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Let facts speak for themselves

OBJECTIVITY should be foremost in the mind of any right-thinking person with a sense of justice and fair play. Yet, his understanding and interpretation of matters confronting him can be coloured by misinformation. And it is the perception of things that are pertinent as the world embarks on the information technology route. As the world gets smaller, problems in global trade and finance are bound to occur. This is where injustices and violation of fair play can occur, and where international law and practices have to be given attention to ensure small countries have their rightful place in the sun and not be sidelined, or worse, swallowed by the big boys.

This is also where the systematic violation of human rights is possible, just as it has happened with currency traders who played havoc with the currencies of nations with their actions, leaving millions of people impoverished and wiping out years of hard work. Clearly, this is something self-proclaimed human rights activists can chew on as they continue to perceive countries in the throes of development as third-class nations, fumbling along with legal processes and with a proclivity to injustice and bad intent.

The "more and more peculiar" perception of things and ideas about human rights on the part of some people was the gist of one question Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad posed to international lawyers attending the 12th Commonwealth Law Conference in Kuala Lumpur. If $A + B = C$ were to always equal C , then life would be so much simpler. Obviously, nothing is static, just as the legal system that Malaysia "imported" from the United Kingdom had to be adapted to suit our needs.

Jurisprudentially, human rights should be seen in the context of a society's historical, social and cultural background. What is tolerable in one society may not be acceptable in another. The fabric of society is such that its cultures, values and moral fibre hold sway. Even the freedom of expression can be subjective. If this robs the country of its peace and prosperity, then such freedom cannot be condoned. Having said that, it does not mean we are undemocratic. If democracy is utilitarianism at its best, then Malaysia has, and still is, fulfilling its obligation in traversing that road in championing poverty eradication, trying to ensure the people have a roof over their heads; in short, seeing to their fundamentals needs. To quote Henry de Montherlant: "The laws of life are founded on necessity, its charms on the non-essentials."

Before people living in glass houses decide to throw stones, they have to remember that no system is without flaws. Malaysia is a nation built on a melange of diversity and division, a country that believes in upholding the rule of law. If we have been able to achieve prosperity and create wealth for the nation, see to it that the rakyat have a decent standard of living and, more importantly, ensure there is peace and stability, we cannot have deviated that far.

Our achievements did not come easy. They are the result of a lot of hard work in a country where the people have learned to live in peace. There is no need to wave placards to put our views across or to mollify dissenters opposed to our views. And who are the dissenters to set standards for us based on their yardstick? Perhaps, some of them ought to look in their own backyard, where rights of individuals are sometimes infringed.

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