

20 APR 1999

Post (commentary)

WASHINGTON POST A DISGRACE TO THE MEDIA COMMUNITY

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, April 20 (Bernama) -- The Washington Post, one of America's most respected newspapers -- known for digging the dirt on the scandalous Watergate affair that toppled the American presidency -- today published a scathing editorial on Malaysia.

The editors at the Post are apparently living in another planet and appear oblivious to the current economic and political developments in Malaysia.

In an editorial titled "Mr. Mahathir's Disgrace," the Post says that while the "region's democracies" - Thailand and South Korea - were showing early signs of economic recovery, Malaysia "... a country that once led the way in stability and prosperity ... seems to be stuck in reverse."

Have the editors at the Post been reading publications and reports other than those issued by credible multilateral organisations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank, which all report signs of recovery and project positive growth for Malaysia for this year and the next?

These organisations may not approve of Malaysia's control measures, but at least they have the guts to tell the world that Malaysia, which has refused an IMF programme undertaken by Thailand, Korea and Indonesia, is showing signs of economic recovery.

The ADB today forecasts a positive 0.7 percent growth for Malaysia in 1999, zero growth in Thailand, while Indonesia's economy will remain flat. Is anyone at the Post listening or reading?

Even the international financial sectors, including American, are upbeat about the Malaysian economy and a few are projecting growths of 2 or even 3 percent for Malaysia this year.

Maybe the arrogant editors at the Post feel that they do not need to read what the others have written because they think that what they write is the truth and cannot be challenged.

The sad truth is that whatever the Post writes tend to be believed by the majority of the American public who do not have a clue about who Dr. Mahathir is and where Malaysia is on the map.

As always, the Post has a bone to pick with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. Post editors say the prime minister is "the chief cause of Malaysia's problems" and regards former deputy prime minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who last week received a six-year jail sentence, as "the chief symbol of its [Malaysia's] trouble."

The Post editors unabashedly support Anwar and his cause and seem to approve street riots by Anwar's supporters in the name of democracy.

Perhaps the Post should define the word "democracy" again.

Do the editors at the Post want or like to see in Malaysia street riots, burning and looting of buildings and senseless beatings as in Indonesia -- all in the name of "democracy?"

The Post should realise that while not all Malaysians support Dr. Mahathir, nor do they all support Anwar.

Not everyone loves Dr. Mahathir nor does everyone want Anwar to be the next prime minister of Malaysia.

Are they aware that Kelantan is ruled by opposition PAS?

That's what the electoral process is about. Let the Malaysians decide for themselves, and if a team of international observers want to watch how we vote, let them.

But the Malaysian public, who have suffered through the May 13 riots, want peace and harmony to be maintained in the country.

They want to keep their jobs, feed their family, hang on to their homes and their Protons.

And what's wrong with that? And if they want a transition in political leadership, they want it to be done through the ballot box. Not on the streets as initiated by Anwar and his friends.

Nobody in Malaysia wants emergency to be imposed on the country nor do they want to go through another curfew or food shortage as a result of riots breaking out all over the nation.

Who, in his right mind, wants to stand in line for water, rice and cooking oil in 80 degree weather while the politicians squabble over who has the right to lead?

The Post, instead of criticising the Malaysian judiciary as having been corrupted by Dr. Mahathir, should also realise that Anwar himself has turned to the Malaysian court to sue the prime minister for wrongful dismissal and defamation.

If Anwar thinks that the Malaysian judiciary is biased and corrupt, why should he even bother going to court?

And lastly, the Post is betting that Anwar's wife, Dr. Wan Azizah Ismail, who has formed a new political party, KeADILan, and other "pro-democracy leaders" would be the wave of Malaysia's future.

"The future is on their side," the Post editors say.

Even Malaysians don't know that for sure, because only God knows.

-- Bernama

sh sj