

Ignoring the rude noises from foreign platforms

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By Shamsul Akmar

IN 1988, supporters of Mr G. Pandithan brought him a coffin as a show of mourning and protest after he was sacked from his post as vice president of the MIC.

Twelve years later, Pandithan, now a Datuk, received a new Mercedes Benz from his supporters, not only to celebrate his investiture but also to show their appreciation of his leadership in the IPF, the splinter party of the MIC.

Such an act legitimises Pandithan's position, no matter how small some may perceive his party to be.

But it is not so easy for others, even though the legitimacy of their leadership had gone through the election process and other acts of affirmation of support.

That is the fate of Barisan Nasional component parties and leaders.

Some of the criticism comes from those representing political parties which had failed to unseat the Barisan Nasional (BN) in the general elections.

And then there are those who choose to do it individually, or by representing some small group or NGO, who never had to go through the process of legitimising their leadership in their organisation.

But of more concern is the trend among some opposition leaders and members of NGOs to choose a foreign platform to undermine the Government and the country's leadership.

An irate supporter of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wrote in the *New Straits Times' Letters to the Editor* page last week, lambasting a Elizabeth Wong for going to Thailand and taking advantage of the international platform to run down the Prime Minister.

Apart from that, she criticised Thailand for remaining silent on the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim issue, blaming this on Asean's policy of non-interference.

All this was reported in the leading Thai English daily, *The Nation*.

PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor, when asked about the use of foreign platforms to run down the country's leaders, said:

"It is a common thing. After all, government leaders, too, criticise the Government.

"The statement in Australia by (Datuk) Rais Yatim on the conduct of the Chief Justice reflects this. Why should the opposition be criticised when it does the same?"

Of course there is a difference, and the question of whether anyone from Malaysia should go abroad to run down the nation's leaders remains unanswered.

Another observer views the matter in a less partisan perspective:

"It is simply a case of not being able to convince the locals that these individuals — NGO representatives or opposition leaders — have to go abroad to give such labels.

"I am sure those who oppose the Government had tried their level best to undermine BN leaders before and during the general elections but the majority of the people nevertheless went on to give their votes to the ruling coalition.

"These people will return, come the next round of general elections. For now, they are enjoying their trips abroad, making wild accusations to ensure that what they are saying is exciting enough for the foreign media to want to publish it."

On that score, supporters of Dr Mahathir and the BN should not get overly uptight about Wong and others like her.

In fact, they should be asking why such unjustified remarks like Wong's go unchallenged by Malaysian envoys abroad when these issues get printed or highlighted in the media of the countries concerned.

Unless these envoys had tried and the media there had chosen to ignore their replies or rebuttals.

Even so, the envoys should make it known back home that they had made the rebuttals (if these had been rejected).

At least then Malaysians will realise how free and fair the foreign media is.

This, however, remains a distant hope.

On a shorter note, supporters of Dr Mahathir and the BN will for the time being have to swallow the insults and unjustified accusations that pour forth.

Of course such accusations have the potential of straining bilateral ties between Malaysia and the other nations though the cause may have come from the Malaysians themselves.

This phenomenon is not something new.

History has shown that when many a nation crumbled due to external forces, it was always the forces from within which had triggered the collapse in the first place.

Some of these domestic forces became heroes but many, too, became traitors as the chapters became part of history.

Yet history takes a long time to shape. For now, the people will be the judge.

And let's pray that they are not myopic.