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A new form of colonialism

IT IS becoming quite clear now that globalisation, as the West defines it, is just an excuse to legitimise men's desire to conquer his fellow men. Three hundred years before the birth of Christ, as Alexander the Great marched eastwards from ancient Greece in a quest to conquer the world, his huge army trampled easily over smaller ones in what was not at all unlike the scenario for today's globalisation. Except instead of armies, it will be giant corporations trampling over borderless nations and devouring small and weak companies for their own empires. Those who rule a larger number of markets and consumers will be kings and emperors; the rest of the modern world, like the defeated in Alexander the Great's conquests, will be slaves and servants.

Men have not stopped building empires since. Smaller empires have been conquered by bigger ones, big ones have collapsed due to internal strife, sometimes only natural catastrophes could cause empires to perish. Battles were fought on land and at sea, and the biggest conquerors like Hannibal and Genghiz were born on both sides of the Suez. A thousand years later, the colonial masters were born and their reigns did not end until late in the 20th century. Globalisation is now being seen in the same vein, as an attempt to build empires and establish colonies in the new millennium. The would-be conquerors will be the giant corporations backed by their governments. These corporations are even now merging among themselves to prepare not for battle but for the massacre of small companies in small countries. They will conquer other corporations and from there they will seize control of economies, governments and peoples. Three hundred years from now, Bill Gates could be Bill the Great.

Far-fetched? Certainly not. If one believes that history will repeat itself over and over again, then globalisation is the new form of colonisation. Obviously, it was an idea conceived by Western intellectuals. Which explains why there is very little regard for developing countries' interests and concerns. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has pushed for opening up of markets and liberalisation of economic sectors in the name of free economy, but developing countries' fear that globalisation will expose them to a lopsided competition is very real. The big multinational corporations will be spoilt for choice and have their pick of companies in other countries to buy, or run over. The smaller companies in Malaysia, for example, will be vulnerable and defenceless, unless they merge among themselves. Even then they may not be strong enough to withstand the invasion of the multinational and transnational corporations. For survival, they may have to offer themselves for so-called strategic alliances with the foreign giants. Either way, these giants win.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's insistence on modifying the concept of globalisation arises out of the concern that it is not being very fair on the small and weak. Globalisation has already shown signs of becoming a religion that tolerates no heresy. Anyone who dares to go against globalisation will be regarded as heretic and will be universally condemned. And this, many would agree, could spell the failure of the exercise. Which would be a pity because globalisation, if properly interpreted and regulated, can bring about a great deal of wealth and benefit to the world, the rich as well as the poor.

Globalisation should result in the flow of productive foreign direct

investment into developing and least developed countries. It should also result in transfers of technology which will help the development of these economies and their companies. Malaysia, for example, benefitted from these and, as a result, developed into an economy that could afford to buy products from the rich countries and, in turn, sell them commodities and raw materials. Giant corporations from Japan, the US, and Europe have come to this country, some for more than a century, and have been able to make profits year after year not by devouring local companies but working with them and helping them. If globalisation departs from this tradition and pursue the more hostile approach it has set for itself, the result can only benefit one party.

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