

05/06/2000

Lesson to be learnt from Roman times

Baharudin A. Latif

IT is interesting to note that Mazlan Nordin has turned to film reviewing ("Personally Speaking", May 26).

I can't comprehend its lessons for politicians, unless the reference is to the killing of Marcus Aurelius by his "son" Commodus.

The only practical reference I can think of was the reference by our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad some years ago to the story of Julius Caesar who was murdered by his Cabinet in a conspiracy one of whose ringleaders was his "adopted" son Brutus.

Hollywood films, it must be noted, are full of historical distortions.

Gladiator is a thinly disguised remake of 1964's The Fall Of The Roman Empire. The main characters, Marcus Aurelius, his daughter Lucilla and "son" Commodus are the leads in both films. Maximus, the character of Lucilla's one-time lover in Gladiator, is fictitious.

In Fall, her lover is named Gaius Metallus Livius, also a fictitious character. Commodus, assumed to be Marcus Aurelius' "son", is actually born of an illicit affair between his wife (Lucilla's mother) and the captain of Marcus Aurelius' personal bodyguards. Commodus kills his father when told this.

The love affair between Lucilla and her fictitious paramour is explained in Fall. Lucilla has been forced by her father to marry the King of Armenia, a strategy to strengthen the Roman empire and help it defeat the barbarians.

Aurelius, grateful to Lucilla for the sacrifice, must have felt the least he could do was keep the lovers together.

So he appoints Livius his successor so he can be near Lucilla and not stationed at the border where the war still rages on.

In Fall, after Livius has bested Commodus in a duel, he is offered the crown, which he rejects outright. Therefore, it is open season for the Emperor's job.

The Senators start offering millions to each other to get it. So, "money politics" existed even in ancient Rome, a virus which finally led to its fall. The narrator grimly reminds us that "a great civilisation is not conquered from without, until it has destroyed itself from within."

Perhaps this is the kind of lesson Dato Mazlan was looking for?