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Lessons from arms heist

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LAST week was a period of national anxiety, fear, relief, anger and sadness.

The one thing the arms heist in Grik by a group of unstable criminals proved was that despite the peace and stability our country enjoys, we can never let our guard down nor can we take this peace and stability for granted.

Now that the crisis has been overcome and as our nation goes through a period of soul searching, what saddens most is that partisan politics is quickly trying to take advantage of a nation's anguish to score points.

Sensible and right-thinking Malaysians cannot and must not allow irresponsible elements to distract us from the bigger picture of ensuring continuity of the spirit of racial and religious tolerance which has been the cornerstone of our survival as a people and nation.

To ensure that we do not veer off in another direction, we have to be rational, calm and repentant, and look at the facts clearly as we move on in our quest to survive and succeed as a Malaysian people and a Malaysian nation.

When this insane group of so-called religious people stole the lethal cache of weapons, the nation was in anxiety and fear.

What if the weapons were distributed and cached away in different parts of the country? What if this group carried out random acts of terrorism?

There was relief when these fiendish terrorists surrendered and all the weapons were recovered. There was sadness that two of our own brave uniformed personnel, Ranger Mathew anak Medan and Special Branch Corporal R. Sagadevan, were brutally and senselessly tortured and murdered.

There was anger that the breakdown in security measures had allowed such a tragedy to happen. There was gratitude and appreciation that the police and armed forces succeeded in bringing an end to the crisis without further loss of life.

We can see that there is remorse and regret on the part of the Defence Ministry and our hope is that this time, lessons have been truly learnt and mistakes will not be repeated. Neither Mindef nor the soldiers in charge at Grik deliberately allowed the Al-Ma'unah to steal the weapons.

While there may be some who are fast to throw accusations and recriminations, we have to remember that our soldiers and police have sacrificed their lives for 50 years to fight the communist insurgency, Konfrontasi, racial, criminal and other conflicts to ensure that we live in a safe society.

We have to be able to forgive their mistake, costly as it may have been, because in the end, it was people like Mathew and Sagadevan who gave their lives to pay for that mistake and ensure our system remained intact and our society, safe.

The question we have to answer as a nation is how could such a group of fanatics breed in our system? How did a barely educated ex-private in the army manage to blind well-educated Malays to blindly follow him on a path of ruin and destruction?

One clue could be Amin's education in a pondok at Memali where the last such act of violence in our nation's history took place in 1985.

It is common knowledge that Amin had in his car stickers and posters of an opposition party striving to set up an Islamic state. It is unlikely that this opposition party put Amin and his renegades up to what they did.

But it is more than likely, from what Amin's relatives now say, that the seeds of hate they sowed in Amin in Memali moulded his perspective.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was only being consistent when he directed the Barisan Nasional MPs to take a common stand in condemning those who make use of religion to pursue self-interest. He and other leaders of Government have always warned of the extremists who teach children in their kindergartens and religious schools to despise and hate the country's leaders.

Today, in Mohd Amin Mohd Razali we see the effects of such hate teachings.

But sadly, when we have to cast aside partisan politics and reconcile as a people to fight such extremists, people in the DAP, Pas, Keadilan are bent on exploiting the situation for political interests.

Lim Kit Siang says Corporal Sagadevan should be promoted like the late Private Mathew. Pas has kept largely silent. Chandra Muzaffar chooses the day of mourning for the late Sagadevan's and Mathew's families to give a Press conference on his differences with Marina Yusof.

Did any of them even visit the victims of this tragedy? Did any of them thank the police and armed forces who risked their lives to apprehend these criminals? Did Lim look at his political partners, Pas, and tell them that they should review their policy of teaching their brand of Islam in taska and pondok? Did Chandra Muzaffar think that it may have been more appropriate to reform his political partners' extremist views rather than wash his dirty linen in public?

No, of course not. The usual recrimination, calls for resignation, royal commissions and exploiting issues like posthumous promotions were the order of the day.

Certainly, the Government is not perfect. Certainly, there was a lapse in security. Certainly, there are people in authority who are accountable. These issues have to be addressed.

But let us not forget the larger issue - how did our society allow monsters like Amin and his renegades to be created in our midst?

For once, the opposition parties and people like Lim and Chandra should offer their hands in co-operation to the ruling party to jointly work towards ridding Malaysian society of elements such as the Al-Ma'unah and to realise a situation where such elements cannot breed.

I cannot understand how any rational Malaysian could condone or not condemn Al Ma'unah's acts of terrorism and murder. I cannot understand how Reformasi websites like Laman Reformasi or their sympathisers, like Malaysiakini.com, could praise these monsters or congratulate them for "breaching security". Do Lim, Pas, Chandra and Keadilan support the view expressed in Laman Reformasi and Malaysiakini?

I sincerely hope not.