

23/01/2000

No ghost writer for this column

A. Kadir Jasin

HAJI Salleh bin Tahir of Kampung Tobiar, in the district of Pendang in Kedah, was very upset. He accused me of telling a lie and of using "mata pena untuk memutarbelitkan sesuatu hukum dan memanjangkan fatwa karut."

Although Salleh, I believe, is not the only reader who is unhappy with some of the things said in this column, I am compelled to acknowledge his complaint for a number of reasons.

First of all, he is my uncle. He is one of my father's 15 siblings. Secondly, he is one of the more enlightened of them. Thirdly, and perhaps in this instance most importantly, he is a staunch Pas supporter and yet seems to be aware of what was written in this column.

He did not read the column himself. But according to his letter, several callers from as far as Malacca and Kuala Lumpur had telephoned him about the column.

I had said in the Dec 5 column that Salleh must be very happy with Pas' victory in the Nov 29 general election and for moving much closer to his quest for heaven.

I accept his condemnation in good spirits. Never mind if he accused me of "semata-mata membodek atau mengampu Dr Mahathir." That is his right. I have been called worse names and suffered worse retribution for my views.

Here and now I acknowledge Salleh's reminder that the ultimate punishment will be that of God.

The condemnation aside, my message reached its intended audience. In communication, that is the ultimate objective.

Let me from the outset say sorry to him if he has been offended by my comment. Having said that, I should clarify my statements because Salleh, in his "surat terbuka buat anak saudara Datuk A Kadir Jasin" dated Jan 5 had misinterpreted them. He had taken them literally.

When I said he voted for Pas in the hope of going to heaven, I was not saying that he did not perform other hukum agama. Or that he was merely banking on his support for Pas to pave the way to heaven.

I will be among the first to acknowledge that he is a pious Muslim. I know this for sure. Like my father, he too was educated in the pondok.

But he cannot deny that he considers supporting Pas as part and parcel of being a good Muslim. He may not himself say this openly. But there is no denying that Pas campaigners used this reason widely among the voters.

YES, I did quote him about poverty in a Berita Harian article 15 years ago. I thank him for reminding me of it and for sending a photocopy of the report.

I am still not denying that there are pockets of poverty among the Malays and the rural people.

In fact, there will always be poverty no matter how well-developed a society is. Otherwise, how do we explain God's order to the Muslims to pay the zakat? One of the eight applications of zakat revenue is to help the poor.

Poverty is relative to the wealth of a State or society. A poor person in a rich country like Saudi Arabia is very rich by the standards of a poor country.

In fact, a poor Muslim in Malaysia is better off than an average person, say in Indonesia or Bangladesh.

Yes I did write, as Salleh pointed out, about poverty in Padang Terap, Kedah, during the 1985 parliamentary by-election.

I acknowledge saying that Pas was using the issue to the hilt. I even predicted that Pas would continue to use it in future elections and warned the Barisan Nasional and Umno not to neglect pockets of poverty in such areas as Padang Terap.

Some years later, I wrote an article highlighting the various projects for the hardcore poor of the area.

Of course, Salleh could look back with great satisfaction that he was among the people quoted in the 1985 report. He had then complained that poverty was still widespread in the rural areas after 30 years of independence.

I am sure he is still in a state of ecstasy following the success of Pas in capturing Padang Terap and seven other parliamentary seats in Kedah in the November general election.

Heaven aside, I am sure he is on cloud nine.

I WOULD also like to thank reader Datuk J. Jagadeeson for his kind words in a handwritten letter dated Jan 16. I am touched.

Yes, he is correct. We have not seen each other since the last millennium and I haven't yet invited him to my open house. He is welcome with or without a formal invitation should one be held.

I would also like to point out to Jagadeeson, better known among his great many friends and co-workers at the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority where he was until last year, the deputy director-general, simply as Jega, that he and I are very old people. We were born in the last century.

But we are also very lucky to be living in two centuries - the 20th and 21st. More so in a country which is exceptionally peaceful by the standards of the turbulent world.

I thank Jega for his concern. Being a God-fearing and charitable person, I am sure he is the first to admit that in life, no pursuit is absolutely safe.

There is risk in everything that we do. Whether one is pushing the boundaries, as Jega described it, or not, is unimportant. If a person believes strongly enough in something, he or she should be willing to face a backlash.

I agree wholeheartedly with Jega that we should be able or willing to look at ourselves straight in the eye and be able to laugh at our weaknesses and idiosyncracies, and through such self-examination and laughter, find a new medium for progress.

Let me also assure Jega that, whether now or in the run-up to the general election, there has never been a ghost writer and, I pray to God, that there will never ever be one.

I am solely responsible for every word published in this column (except its title) since it came into being on Jan 19, 1992.

(The name Other Thots was the brainchild of New Sunday Times assistant editor Alan Rashid de Souza. He thought Other Thots was catchy and easy to remember.)

I often told readers who confronted me over the title that unless we defend and improve the standard of English in our country, that is how we are going to end up spelling "thought".

There is no ghost writer for this or any other column bearing my byline. I would like to think that I am the ghost.

And I hope Jega was merely being provocative when he suggested that "people with personal motives were using my Brother Kadir" to write this column. I write because I am a scribe.

I wish Jega all the best. I think he is doing a useful humanitarian service helping the South countries, in particular the African nations, to develop their industrial capacity.

I am sure he can, as he wrote in his letter, use his 30 years of experience and knowledge in industrial development to help these nations.

He will not end up like Don Quixote, the character in Miguel de Cervantes' novel, who was convinced that chivalry was alive in a corrupt and fallen world as he searched for the ideal with comic recklessness and naivety accompanied by his sidekick, the loyal and pragmatic Sancho Panza.

I WOULD also like to recognise Dr P. Muthusamy of Kota Kinabalu for his letter concerning the prizes for Bank Simpanan Nasional's premium savings certificates' new millennium draw.

While it is true that the draw is regularly advertised in "your newspapers", as Dr Muthusamy put it, let me once again clarify that advertisements do not come under the control of the editors. They are the concern of the business side of the newspaper operation.

Nonetheless, as a reader, he has every right to voice his opinion on whatever that is published in the newspaper, including advertisements.

He wrote: "Do you approve a Mercedes Benz worth RM710,000 being given as a prize along with Mercedes Benz E240 and C200?"

"Do we not have locally made products equally attractive? Can't we give an equivalent bungalow?"

"Even the Prime Minister is driving a Proton and wants his Ministers to use them.

"What category of people save money with BSN? Will not a Mercedes Benz S280 be a white elephant?"

For his sake and mine, his subsequent comments are omitted. And for his "please do something" plea, I believe the most appropriate authority is the bank itself.

I am highlighting this because Dr Muthusamy addressed his letter to me and implicated the newspaper for publishing the advertisement.

IN this column on Aug 8 last year, I wrote to express deep concern over reports of indiscipline and criminal activities involving members of the armed forces and the police.

I said although mathematically their numbers may be insignificant (less than 150 in the case of the military, according to one report), they could undermine the strength and credibility of the force.

I wrote: "Even more disturbing are the offences committed. Soldiers were known to have been killed while committing robberies. Others were charged and found guilty of rape, armed robbery and gun-running.

"Military personnel were caught stealing guns and other lethal weapons from their own units and peddling them to criminals and murderers."

Our fear was once again proven to be right when, on Tuesday, police shot dead four robbers armed with stolen army Steyr assault rifles. One of them was a former member of the army's Gerak Khas commando unit.

The guns were believed to have been stolen from the Royal Ordnance Corps armoury in Kamunting, Perak, last July 26.

The police, who have their share of rotten apples, should be congratulated for the latest success. With the robbers so heavily armed, the police team, in this instance, cannot be accused of being trigger-happy. The armed robbers deserved to die.

Those who escaped death will now be severely dealt with in the courts. Armed robbery and illegal possession of firearms carry the mandatory death sentence upon conviction. These criminals deserve no mercy.

In the meantime, the Defence Ministry and the military establishment must be held responsible for the theft of the rifles, more so if their personnel were involved.

Promises alone are insufficient. Sooner or later the people will cease to believe them.

The Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, and the military top brass

must act decisively to end these criminal activities and stop the rot
before they lose public confidence.

(END)