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Of 'orang bunian' and conspiracy theory

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IF the word "if", as discussed in last week's column, is popular with Umno leaders aspiring to contest in the upcoming supreme council election, the word conspiracy has become a part of the Malay or even Malaysian psyche.

It is the new hantu, jembalang and orang bunian (genie) of their collective subconscious.

Konspirasi is such a popular and intriguing word that even padi farmers, Felde settlers and taxi drivers use it liberally, never mind if they are not very clear about its origin and meaning.

The Malays have the penchant for borrowing words and expressions from other languages and using them liberally, often at the expense of the existing Bahasa Malaysia terms. In many instances, the use of the "Malaynised" terms are incorrect.

The tendency for the Malays to accept words and expressions from other languages without question has a lot to do with their exposure to foreigners throughout history.

This seems to be the case even with Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the guardian of our National Language.

When the so-called pejuang and pecinta (the protectors and lovers) Bahasa Malaysia speak the language, it sounds more like English - the poor version of the language, of course.

They love to use English words and expressions seolah-olah Bahasa Malaysia tidak lengkap tanpanya.

The Malay Language borrowed heavily from Sanskrit (raja, perwira, pertiwi, barat, utara, jelata, duka, bumi, dunia, manusia, angkasa). This is not surprising because the first major religion to arrive on the Malay peninsula was Hinduism.

When the Malays were converted to Islam, they adopted Arabic and Persian words (syarikat, martabat, masyarakat, muafakat, adil, zalim, tamadun, siasah).

They opposed the Portuguese colonisers' attempt to convert them to Christianity in the mid-16th century, but borrowed many Portuguese words and some elements of their culture like balada, soldado, massa and tempo.

Today, with the exposure of the Malays to business, science, technology and more so to Western entertainment, the borrowing and copying of English has become an orgy.

So, young lovers no longer kecewa bercinta (failing in love) but frus bercinta - the word frus being the Malaynised version of the word frustration.

But the majority of Malay speakers are not even aware that there is no such word as frus or frust in the English language.

It is horrifying when almost every Malay speaker, including journalism graduates from Universiti Teknologi Mara, think that there is such an English word as frus or frust.

My way of shocking them is to give them an English dictionary, usually the Oxford, and ask them to find the word frust. You can see their utter bewilderment when they cannot find it.

Yet, I have come to believe that no other English word or concept has had such an impact on the Malays in recent times. So, many Malay youths resorted to dadah and other destructive activities because aku frus (I am frustrated).

The word has had a far worse impact on the thinking and behaviour of the

young Malays than the more accurate and beautiful Malay words like hampa, kecewa, merana, dukacita and many more that describe one's sense of frustration.

IN recent years, konspirasi has become a part of the Malay political thinking - real or imagined.

It was a very clever choice of word. The Malays get easily influenced by things they do not deeply understand.

In the days when dukun and bomoh prevailed over the life and death of the Malays, illness and death were often attributed to or blamed on the evil spirits from the hantu to the pelesit, penunggu, polong and langsuir.

A person could be dying of cancer or tuberculosis. But when he vomited blood, it was blamed on the santau (poison).

Bomoh santau, like today's sweet-talking politikus and the purveyors of the conspiracy theory, benefited from the Malays' belief in santau and the power of the bomoh and dukun to cure them from unknown or unexplained illnesses.

When an unmarried girl or a married woman - whose husband was away on a long trip - became pregnant, the poor orang bunian got the blame.

The girl's parents were saved the embarrassment and the husband was spared being called bacul (coward) because to the Malay mind, there was little one could do to fend off the unique power of those tiny orang bunian whose sexual appetite was supposed to be legendary - a case of a tiny fellow with a huge "mojo".

So if any of you had ever gone for a deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) test and your genes resembled none of your father's, you could have been sired by an orang bunian. Lucky devil you!

Those were the days, my friend. We thought they'd never end. We'd sing and dance forever and a day. We lived the life we chose. We'd fight and never lose. Oh yes, those were the dayssssssssssss.

Life was simpler then. We did not lose sleep over konspirasi although dengki (envy) and khianat (deceit, treachery) had always been the devils that resided in the deep recesses of our hearts.

Then the Malays were more than happy to support the Perikatan and Barisan Nasional because they got free ubat (medicines) in free plastic bottles from the pusat kesihatan (health centres) and rumah sakit (hospitals).

Those tiny plastic bottles, which were the subject of an election ceramah by a friend of mine, Hasbullah "Sheikh" Haji Hashim, in Alor Star in the 1982 general election, were godsend.

The voters were grateful that they no longer had to carry the huge lemonade or zam-zam hair oil bottles to the klinik.

But today, the children of these grateful recipients of the free plastic bottles are carrying a different type of plastic. They carry plastic money - Visa, Amex and Master cards.

THE spoon-feeding by the New Economic Policy and later the National Development Policy catapulted them to the ranks of new middle class and the orang kaya baru - the nouveau riche.

In all that time, they have rarely been made to account for their success and for the things they enjoyed.

On the pretext that they were left behind, they were given facilities that were supposed to help them to catch up.

Many did catch up or even outperform their counterparts from other ethnic groups. But the majority are where they are today because the NEP and NDP opened the way and gave them the edge.

Things like scholarships and jobs were taken for granted. They were treated as rights instead of privilege.

While they may speak of Islam and Islamic state, they are no longer

grateful and thankful.

Now they speak of keadilan and ketelusan. They demand justice and transparency. They accuse the Government of being unjust and lacking in transparency.

Perhaps it is time to give them a taste of their own medicine - no more spoon-feeding, no more Maktab Rendah Sains Mara, no more credit points for being a Malay and a village dweller, and no more discounts for houses.

Justice and transparency should rightly mean fairness to all and priority to the highest achiever.

If Ahmad has eight As and Ah Chong has nine, Ahmad should give way to Ah Chong.

But what have Ahmad's brothers and sisters who are at UKM, UPM and UM, and campaigned for the opposition in the recent general election, to say to this?

Were they the best in their schools that they gained entry into the universities? And are they the best in their universities that they get government scholarships?

Is the Government being just and transparent in giving them places in the universities, and scholarships to fund their studies if they are not the best?

Who is conspiring against whom? Who is unjust? Who is lacking in transparency? Who is corrupt?

THE Malays, especially those in the universities, the civil service and the business sector, should be very careful when talking about justice and transparency.

They should be grateful that in this multi-racial country of ours, there are things that the non-Malays would rather leave unspoken or, even if they do, they would do it in the most guarded manner.

It is time that those Malays who have benefited from the NEP and NDP and from the Malay leadership of the country be truthful to themselves.

They must understand that their demand for justice, transparency and accountability can turn out to be senjata makan tuan. They must themselves be ready to be held accountable.

Yes, we need all those. But we also need stability, unity and peace. Can these champions of keadilan and ketelusan accept an egalitarian society or can they survive in one?

It seems that for many Malays - this scribe included - yesterday was a better time. Yesterday all our troubles seemed so far away. Now it looks as if they're here to stay.

Or, are we, as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad likes to say, still able to tell the world that "I did it my way"?

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