

24/09/2000

Of security measures and empty talk

A. Kadir Jasin

MOST newspapers on Wednesday highlighted the Prime Minister's dissatisfaction with the level of security along Sabah's coastline.

The Utusan Malaysia headlined: "PM tidak puas hati - tahap kawalan keselamatan di perairan Sabah perlu dipertingkatkan" (PM is dissatisfied - the level of security patrols in Sabah waters has to be stepped up).

The Star, under the banner "repel the invaders" quoted Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying in Kota Kinabalu that he was still not satisfied with the measures taken to boost security along Sabah's long and porous coastline.

This was followed on the same day by a Cabinet order for security measures to be beefed up. The Utusan headlined it: Kawalan diperketatkan - Kabinet arah ATM tambah penempatan tentera di Sabah (Tighten Security Measures - Cabinet directs the Armed Forces to station more personnel in Sabah).

Understandably, it was not easy for the Prime Minister to make such a conclusion as it reflected negatively on a lot of people and agencies responsible for defence and security of the country.

But without him saying so, the very same people and agencies would be less than inclined to accept a similar sentiment expressed by others. They are known to have taken exception to such a viewpoint expressed in the media.

Hopefully, the Prime Minister's comment and the Cabinet's instruction will prompt them to rethink their stance and marshal the courage to acknowledge that there have been dangerous defence and security lapses lately.

Otherwise how do we explain the repeated raids on our islands by Filipino gunmen in the last four months resulting in our people and our foreign guests being taken hostage. The latest incident on Sept 10 happened despite promises by the highest officers in the defence and security establishments that coastal patrols had been stepped up.

There appears to be a deeper problem in our defence and security establishments. It can be said that for quite a long time they have not been called upon to account for their preparedness, or the lack of it, until the Al-Ma'unah raid in Perak and the hostage taking in Sabah.

Since the disbanding of the Malayan Communist Party and the laying down of arms by its fighters more than a decade ago, the preparedness of the military has never been truly tested.

The public is told that the military is actively involved in guarding our sea and land borders against infiltration by illegal immigrants and other undesirable elements in collaboration with other law enforcement agencies.

But the body count of illegal immigrants who drowned at sea while trying to reach our shores alone suggests that the enforcement has not been effective enough to deter them. If unarmed civilians in wooden boats can infiltrate our coastline, one wonders what assurance we have that we are safe from the better equipped raiders and insurgents.

The sterling performance of our soldiers and policemen in UN peacekeeping duties around the world will be rendered hollow if the sovereignty of our territory continues to be violated at will.

On the same subject, I beg to disagree with Mokhtar Ismail of Kajang, Selangor, who wrote to the Utusan Melayu (Thursday) to propose the

formation of a coast guard to patrol our shores.

With some 320,000 members, we have more than enough soldiers and policemen to guard our territorial waters and coastlines. All that is needed is for them to do a better job.

I WISH I had the courage and confidence to share the optimism expressed by a certain minister that the latest kidnapping in Sabah by Filipino terrorists of three Malaysians will not affect tourism.

It may not affect tourism elsewhere in Malaysia. On the contrary, resort areas may benefit from tourist flight from dangerous spots in Sabah. But for Sabah in general and its southeastern islands in particular, the immediate future does not look promising. At least not until and unless these terrorists are blown to bits.

In fact, we have to fear that the ongoing military action by the Philippine Government may prompt the terrorists and other armed gangs to seek shelter in Sabah. So the order to shoot these terrorists if they enter our territory deserves our fullest support.

It must be borne in mind that there are an estimated 50,000 people with refugee status in the State. Many more are in the State illegally. The terrorists may seek shelter among these people.

It is totally understandable that more and more people in Sabah are beginning to lose patience with the refugees. Some have gone to the extent of suggesting that there is a hidden agenda in allowing them to stay so long and live freely in the State.

Knee-jerk action by the authorities does not promote confidence. Yet some of them had the audacity to tell us that the latest kidnapping happened only a day before new security measures were put in place.

What hogwash! What have they been doing since the first hostage-taking raid months ago?

But unlike my fellow scribe Awang Sulung of Mingguan Malaysia, I have given up the idea of asking responsible people to take responsibility for such a debacle. What more to suggest that they should resign.

A surat layang has a better chance of hounding them out of their jobs than a barrage of criticism by the media. The media cannot do so without being accused of harbouring an agenda or promoting a conspiracy. It seems that it is not our culture to accept responsibility and resign.

All that I can say is we should not misinform the tourists. If we cannot reasonably guarantee their safety, we should not encourage them to go to these unsafe places. We should tell them the truth.

The Sipadan incident and the resolution of the ensuing crisis did not speak well of our role as host to the foreigners taken hostage by the terrorists.

After all why should they want to come to our country if only to be taken hostage by foreign raiders?

As for the Pulau Pandanan raid, we can only hope and pray that the three Malaysian hostages are not harmed following last week's attack by the Filipino armed forces on the suspected hide-outs of their captors.

IT is heard on the grapevine that Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has no problem sleeping after making major governmental decisions.

But he was reported to have told close friends at a gathering in Kuala Lumpur some days ago that he could not sleep if he could not help a friend.

He said he was aware that many friends had counted on him to help them in private and official matters. But it is humanly impossible for him to fulfil all their expectations. He pleaded for their understanding and patience.

Understandably, Abdullah has many friends - genuine friends. Friends who

remain with him through thick and thin. Friends who were willing to be politically incorrect by sticking with him when he was down and out.

For a political leader who has gone through so many phases of life, Abdullah naturally gathered countless friends and acquaintances. He was an active youth leader and senior civil servant before taking the long and sometimes arduous political road. He is, above all, an ulama. But unlike pseudo ulama, he does not flaunt his religious credentials.

Now that Abdullah is back in power and within sight of the pinnacle of power, these friends - some, if not all - must surely be hoping that he will help them in return.

It happens to other politicians and will happen to Abdullah. Within reason, this is neither unexpected nor unreasonable. There is nothing wrong or objectionable for him to help the deserving cases. In fact he must.

But for a leader who has the rare distinction of being labelled "Mr Nice Guy" and "Mr Clean", reputation means everything. His life and career hinge on it.

Abdullah's friends and supporters are as responsible as he is in creating this distinctive image. If they in the past enjoyed being in the company of a nice and clean leader, I am sure they will not now do things to smear his name.

Instead they must protect him from others who may want to take advantage of his pleasant nature for personal gain.

So let us not burden him with things that can cause him to lose sleep. He needs a good night's sleep to be able to carry out the increased burden of running the Government.

SELANGOR Menteri Besar Datuk Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo promised two weeks ago that the State Government would take the creation and maintenance of green lungs seriously. He said laws would be used for the purpose. We have heard such a promise countless times before from successive Menteris Besar.

But with each promise, more green lungs disappeared - chopped down and levelled to make way for roads, houses, factories and even government buildings. Bandar Baru Bangi, where I once lived, is one of the many examples of these broken promises despite being developed almost exclusively by the Selangor State Economic Development Corporation.

Even children's playgrounds and public parks have been known to be taken away and not replaced. Several others were saved by well-publicised public protests.

The ease with which these promises were made and forgotten remind me of a poem by the great Middle-Eastern poet, philosopher and artist Kahlil Gibran in his collection entitled The Prophet. It goes like this:

"And then a scholar said, speak of talking. And he answered saying:

You talk when you cease to be at peace with your thoughts;

And when you no longer dwell in the solitude of your heart, you live in your lips, and sound is a diversion and a pastime.

And in much of your talking, thinking is half murdered.

For thought is a bird of space that in a cage of words may indeed unfold its wings but cannot fly.

There are those among you who seek the talkative through fear of being alone.

The silence of aloneness reveals to their eyes their naked selves and they would escape.

And there are those who talk, and without knowledge or forethought reveal a truth which they themselves do not understand.

And there are those who have the truth within them, but they tell it not in words.

In the bosom of such as these the spirit dwells in the rhythmic silence.

When you meet your friend on the roadside or in the market place, let
the spirit in you move your lips and direct your tongue.

Let the voice within your voice speak to the ear of his ear;

For his soul will keep the truth of your heart as the taste of wine is
remembered when the colour is forgotten and the vessel is no more."

(END)