

18/03/2000

People should open their eyes to the threat of neo-colonialism

Shamsul Akmar

IT was quite scary to read about how a 65-year-old man from Taiping, who was being divorced by his young wife, went berserk.

Apart from threatening his 36-year-old wife with a Rambo knife, he also threw curry powder at her face as well as others who tried to intervene. Such an act can only be described as love or, rather, obsession or possessiveness.

In the past, during the seafaring days of the West, the best among men would travel the seven seas, leaving their spouses and loved ones in search of precious spices.

In the 16th and 17th century, Portuguese and Dutch traders, later joined by the British, travelled wide and far in search of spice.

Cornelius De Houtman and Lopez De Sequeira were among the many Dutch and Portuguese traders who reached the South East Asian shores in search of the exotic stuff.

But what started as mere trading interest turned out to be the beginning of colonisation which lasted in Indonesia and Malaysia for more than 400 years.

The annals would show how the British and Dutch East India Companies, the tools of Western expansion in the East, through choice and design, divided among themselves Malacca, Batavia (the old capital of Indonesia) the Moluccas or Spice Islands and Singapore.

These are matters of the past which, to many, are best discussed during a discourse on history. Otherwise, they should be kept in the archives for students to dig up for their research.

But now, with so much anxiety over neo-colonialism rearing its ugly head, reflections on these historical legacies should help the citizenry to decide whether there is any justification for such fears.

Sceptics will brush it aside as paranoia while the conservatives and the establishment will bet their last dollar that it has already started. The bleeding heart liberals will dismiss it as a Government propaganda while the intellectuals will want to hold a seminar on it, debate on it and then leave it to participants to decide.

In short, when politicians in the country raised the issue of neo-colonialism, society tends to wonder whether it is true or perceived, or merely a political tool for certain leaders to remain in power.

Debates about neo-colonialism were actually rampant during the height of the economic downturn and political crisis following the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim a couple of years ago.

At that time, according to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, neo-colonialism would have become a reality if the economic crisis had had not been handled properly.

The political crisis, given the intense hatred that spiced it, can very well be a vehicle for the neo-colonialists to ride on to pursue their agenda.

It so happened that Malaysia got out of the economic crisis and rode the political uncertainties quite well as reflected by the results of last year's general election.

As such, there is nothing to prove nor disprove that neo-colonialism is in store for the nation.

But for Pas MP Mohamed Sabu who is known for being a loose cannon, he was convinced.

"Indonesia and Malaysia are already on their way to be colonised."  
His justifications were based on the recent developments in Indonesia where its president Abdurrahman Wahid or popularly known as Gus Dur has decided to "engage" former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as the republic's adviser.

To him, Malaysia too is part of the United States' colonisation package as it had opted to engage foreign-based company Salomon Smith and Barney to advise the Government on political and economic matters.

However, this is disputed by an Umno leader who pointed out that the company was paid to carry out the consultancy role and could be dismissed once its contract expired or when the Government did not need it anymore.

"But in the case of Indonesia and Kissinger, it is not a matter of choice but rather, the republic was forced to do so," said the Umno leader, a fact that Mohamed concurred.

Pas Youth chief Mahfuz Omar shared similar sentiments about Gus Dur and Kissinger but was reluctant to discuss the matter further.

His reluctance is understandable especially when Pas and Parti Keadilan Nasional, its partner in the Barisan Alternatif, were shouting glory when Gus Dur became the president.

To Pas then, Gus Dur's ascendancy to the presidency was a victory for Islam as he is the leader of Nahdatul Ulama, the powerful Islamic movement in Indonesia.

For Keadilan, it was a victory for the Indonesian reformasi movement which managed to do away with the status quo - President B.J. Habibie and Golkar.

However, now, as new chapters are charted in Indonesia, both Pas and Keadilan will be treating Gus Dur like a leper and not share his glory anymore.

Both Mohamed and Mahfuz believe that Gus Dur was forced to accept Kissinger if Indonesia were to continue receiving financial aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Much as Pas and Keadilan have every right to dismiss Gus Dur, the question of neo-colonialism in Indonesia is no longer merely perceived but real in so far as the two political parties are concerned.

Back in Malaysia, the question that arises is whether these aspects of neo-colonialism vis-a-vis the IMF would have become a reality here if the nation had taken a different path when dealing with the economic problems? Would rogue currency speculator George Soros who is proposing to be the "master" of financial institutions and public utility entities in Indonesia be able to do the same in Malaysia if the nation's political direction had taken a different path?

The funny thing is this though - while most Malaysians, the opposition included, are more than prepared to accept neo-colonialism creeping into Indonesia, they will not concur when it concerns Malaysia.

Either they feel that Malaysia is too "smart" to be colonised or that the leader who brought it up was someone they disliked.

If only they will open their eyes and minds and not be guided by hatred. Only then can such food for thought add spice to their otherwise myopic existence.

(END)