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Proving US predictions wrong

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IT MUST be cool to be American.

The country is after all accepted as the leading super power in the world and dictates terms at the United Nations.

Their media shape the opinion of the world.

In terms of economic prowess, there is no doubt in the financial strength of its corporations, domestic or multinationals.

More than anything, its citizenry believes the world revolves around America and their leaders make it a point to carry themselves as those responsible in ensuring the well-being of the world.

Of course, there has always been nationalists in other parts of the world who fought hard to ensure their nations are not engulfed by the political hegemony of the US.

But with the end of the Cold War, it is becoming more difficult for these nationalists to stop the influence of the US in shaping their domestic and foreign policies.

Hence, everytime when influential Americans, individually or through groupings, form an opinion on a certain nations, leaders and citizens of these nations can't help but react, Malaysians included.

As such, it was not surprising when the latest edition of the Far Eastern Economic Review carried an article on the American intelligence community's conference on June 22 in Washington entitled "Prospects for a Post-Mahathir Malaysia", the local political grapevines started tingling overtime.

The conference, according to the article, was attended by officials from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the departments of State and Defence.

Speakers included academicians, economists and former American diplomats and journalists in Malaysia.

More interestingly, the conference concluded that Malaysia will face considerable political uncertainty, including infighting in Umno, the ruling political party, once Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad gives up the leadership.

Apart from that, the panelists predicted new economic turmoil in three to five years due to growing fiscal debts, brought on by the country's rescue of troubled companies and the minimal restructuring of the economy in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis.

They concluded that the political career of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was not necessarily over but before he can play a significant political role again, he will have to be pardoned by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and reinstated as an Umno member.

Dr Mahathir's reaction to the article was succinct, saying that the conclusion of the conference that there will be political uncertainty was a move to destabilise the country.

On the economic turmoil, his reply was quite scathing when he pointed out that the Americans had bailed out their own companies and claimed that it did good.

As such, he said, Malaysia was only copying the US and it should also be good.

"They were also doing the same in terms of bailing out car companies and the Long Term Capital Management Fund.

"They say it is good for them and so we are just copying them," the

Prime Minister said.

On the possibility of Anwar's return to the political mainstream, his reply was shorter still: "The Americans may know something I don't."

It is understandable why such a conference in Washington may be capable of destabilising the country.

The US may see the conference as merely an exercise for their future plans in this region and Malaysia, but given the fact that US opinion governs international perceptions, their predictions of instability in a nation can hurt the nation concerned economically.

The forecast that Malaysia will face economic and political instability in three to five years could influence potential multinational investors, who may not know of the actual situation here, to take the conference seriously and change their mind about investing in Malaysia.

But there is nothing much Malaysians can do to stave off such situation especially when dealing with a superpower like the US.

The only salvation Malaysians can hope from this circumstance is that predictions like this had been proven wrong time and again.

In fact, the conference and its conclusion is actually a continuation to what the foreign doomsday prophets had been doing during the height of the economic crisis in 1997.

In retrospect, when Malaysia decided to impose selective capital controls and introduced a fixed ringgit exchange rate to the US dollar, these doomsday prophets gave Malaysia up to six months before it became economically incapacitated.

However, it is almost two years since the controls were announced.

Instead of becoming economically incapacitated, the Malaysian economy is the first in the region to have recovered from the regional financial crisis.

Some of the foreign economic analysts, quoted liberally by the doomsday prophets, had since then also changed their stance and some are even singing praises on the Malaysian leadership, Dr Mahathir especially, for disproving the economic theories of the US-dominated International Monetary Fund (IMF).

On the political front, the situation is more fluid as it all boils down to Malaysians as a whole.

What Dr Mahathir had done is to ensure that the succession in the country's leadership is settled and the way things had shaped in Umno since its general assembly in May, the matter seems resolved.

The only thing which could upset the political stability would be a sudden spark of racial hostility and religious zealotry and extremism.

Even these, despite the recent incident involving the Al-Ma'unah group, seem like remote possibilities.

Much as Malaysians tend to get quite intense when it comes to politics and allow moments of emotional spillovers, the majority will generally opt for the changes in the political leadership to be determined through the ballot boxes.

On that score, it will also be a matter of time before Malaysians will be able to disprove the conclusions of the conference pertaining to the prediction of political instability in the country.

It all boils down to the citizenry being able to realise that much as the Americans may have the satisfaction of coming from a nation that can shape the direction of other countries, Malaysians can say that theirs is not included.

And to be able to say that, they only need to want to be Malaysians and nothing else.

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