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The way the Malay mind works

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DURING his concert in Kuala Lumpur on Monday night, Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan complimented Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said he believed Malaysia will be a strong nation under the leadership of the Prime Minister.

His remarks might have been taken by some people as a mere public relations exercise.

Ironically, some Reformasi supporters recently linked the Hindi blockbuster, *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*, to their struggle, or so said a Hindi movie buff.

These supporters claimed that Khan, the star of the movie, was sympathetic to their cause after witnessing their demonstrations when he was in Kuala Lumpur in 1998, said the fan.

Now that Khan has decided to throw his support behind Dr Mahathir, one wonders if his following in Malaysia, especially among the Malays, will be somewhat affected.

Had he been a local entertainer, he would likely have to brace himself for criticism for making those remarks.

If only he had taken time to check with Siti Nurhaliza, he would at least get an inkling on how some Malays can foam in the mouth by one-off remarks made by entertainers about anything considered political.

It was about a year ago when Siti Nurhaliza said something to the effect that the nation should unite to stave off foreign elements.

Her remarks led to Parti Keadilan Nasional information chief Ruslan Kassim lashing out at her, claiming what she had said sounded very much in consonance with that of Dr Mahathir.

Apart from lambasting her, Ruslan called for a boycott of her songs and since then, nary a line has come from her which could remotely be interpreted as politically inclined.

No doubt, such incidences are reflections of the way the Malay mind works when there are political crises prevailing.

It is not important what Siti Nurhaliza or Khan said or did. It is the way the Malays try to link everything to suit their political leanings.

If entertainers are not to be taken too seriously as their role are after all to entertain, politicians, too, ought to be avoided for they are conspiratorial to the brim.

Then who should the Malays take seriously?

The ulamas, perhaps? But they too seem to have made forays into politics on either side of the political divide.

Along came Army Field Commander Lt Jen Datuk Zaini Mohamed Said, the hero of Sauk, who proved invincibility and supernatural powers are but a myth.

Finally, thought some, there is a hero for the Malays to feel proud of and look up to.

The feel-good factor however proved short-lived, and before long, Zaini was reduced from a full-fledged hero to a mere actor in a play produced by Umno and the Government to score political points.

It is understandable if Zaini were to feel upset even though he was reluctant from the very beginning to be called a hero.

After all, as he had said from the beginning, his role in ending the siege was not a one-man show but rather the collective effort of the police and army.

Denouncing Zaini would mean the lives of army commando Mathew Medan and police officer R. Sagadevan, both brutally murdered by the Al-Ma'unah members, were expendable, in pursuit of the political interests of Umno and the Government of the day.

When asked to comment on the accusations that the entire incident was staged, Zaini, obviously tired of all the talk, had this to say: "If I had died, they will probably say that too was staged".

Given the way things are, such a reaction will not come as a surprise.

To make things more depressing, some Malays have now started defending the deeds of Al-Ma'unah leader Mohd Amin Mohd Razali and his followers, saying that their intentions were noble.

Yes, their intentions: first to topple the Government and then set up an Islamic state followed by the introduction of the hudud (Islamic penal code) and destroy all the deities and breweries tolerated by the present leadership.

To them, the manner the group went about pursuing their cause was not important. It is the end results or their objectives that matter.

In short, these people have, inadvertently become the advocates of Machiavelli. Amin has become the hero among these quarters.

A White Paper on the incident and the impending trial of Amin and gang and the details that will be disclosed cannot be expected to change their way of thinking.

The worry is that those sympathetic to Amin and share the idea that the intentions of his group are noble will grow in number.

Interestingly, this new twist to the Sauk incident has actually negated the theory that the whole thing was staged because such a drama can only be played out if Amin and the rest of the gang were willing participants.

The situation is nothing new, though.

Sadly, it has been the way of late among the Malays, a hero today and a villain tomorrow, just like in the movies.

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