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When meaningful diversions are called for

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CREATING a diversion is an effective tactic to achieve a desired objective in war and peace. During the Second World War, the Allied Forces used diversionary tactics to gain the surprise advantage in their invasion of Europe to defeat Nazi Germany's occupation armies.

The US atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was also a diversionary tactic because the holocaust it created ended the Pacific War.

In peace, diversions from reality can take many forms which may also affect and change the cultures of peoples.

The sense of humour of the Egyptian people is a diversion from their poverty. An Egyptian could not feed his family for lack of funds and had borrowed extensively from relatives and friends. In desperation, he wrote a letter to Allah asking for STG20. The postman delivered the letter to the President who sent him STG10. In thanking Allah for the STG10 he said that Allah should not have sent the money through President Nasser because being a Socialist, the President kept the other STG10!

The Filipinos are very musical. They sing all the time from Imelda Marcos right down to the shop assistants in the departmental stores as an escape from poverty.

Politicians are most adept at creating diversion by using religion, race, culture or language as a means to command a following when faced with political, economic or social problems. Such tactics are of course necessary and unavoidable depending on time and circumstance but can have disastrous effects to a country if resorted to at the wrong time or overdone.

The racial conflicts of Sri Lanka and Kosovo and the religious conflicts in India, Kashmir, Northern Ireland, Bosnia and now in Indonesia bear testimony to political diversions for the wrong reasons.

Religious prejudices can turn minor incidents into ugly scenes. When purchasing beef in the wet market, I witnessed an altercation between two ad-joining beef and mutton sellers because the beef seller in cutting the meat had used the chopper with such great force that it caused blood from the beef to splatter on the mutton stall. Both sellers were Muslims but as beef is forbidden to Hindus, the mutton seller was anxious to retain his Hindu customers!

The promised utopia of Communism as the solution to the poverty of the Russian masses kept the political leadership of the Soviet Union in power for 70 years. The people are still poor.

Sometimes however, political diversions are not created but the opportunity presents itself as an unexpected diversion.

Now, our attention is focused on the Annual General Assembly of Umno which has been fixed from May 11 to May 13 to coincide with the anniversary of the founding of Umno on May 11, 1946.

The Umno General Assembly and election to the supreme council of the party has always attracted public interest, sometimes even more so than the parliamentary general election. This is because Umno being the dominant partner of the Barisan Nasional provides the leaders of the Federal Government from the membership of the supreme council.

The President of Umno automatically becomes the Prime Minister, the Deputy President, the Deputy Prime Minister and the vice-presidents the other Senior members of the Cabinet.

This year's general assembly has assumed greater significance because

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has indicated that in all probability this could be his last term as President of Umno. The announcement has sparked speculation and anxiety as to who would be the future leaders of the country.

For the record it should be said that changes of the Umno leadership and the Government have always been smooth. Malaysia is indeed fortunate in always having the right Prime Minister at the right time.

During the next four months, Umno politics will be our daily diet in the mass media, the coffee shops and the clubs. Beginning last week, Umno branches will hold their annual meetings to elect delegates to the division meetings which in turn will elect delegates to the general assembly who will elect members to the supreme council.

Umno elections are held practically every year. Perhaps in future, the Umno Constitution will provide that party elections at branch, division and national levels are held in the same year between February and May, one after the other, each for three year terms so that the politicians we have elected to office will have more time to concentrate in administering the country economically and socially.

May political wisdom grant us meaningful diversions.

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