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A place many have cherished

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IT is premature to make any conclusion on the cause of the fire that destroyed the historical Dewan Tunku Canselor of Universiti Malaya on Friday.

Although I have nothing to do with the university, the Dewan holds a special meaning. I attended many functions and took part in a number of forums and discussions held there.

At any one time, I have several anak buah attending the university. Many of my well-heeled friends in the public and private sectors claim it as their alma mater.

It does not matter if we have to wait a while for the investigations to reveal the cause of the fire.

Nevertheless, since this not an ordinary structure and its destruction coincided with the planned visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the investigators have to be very thorough.

Since several parties have voiced strong suspicions, including the possibility of arson and sabotage, it would not do any harm for them to appoint their own investigative agents.

The public has every right to get involved. After all, this is a public university and is funded by the taxpayers.

Fire investigation alone is no longer sufficient. Whatever the investigators may discover is academic. The building is already in ruins.

The real question is whether a criminal act has been committed and who committed it.

If it is discovered that a criminal act has been committed, not only the vice-chancellor, Professor Datuk Dr Anuar Zaini Mohd Zain, should face the axe but also the entire university establishment, down to the security guards. Even negligence must be punished.

Being somebody who has not had university education, I am always in awe of this institution. I consider the university a place for intellectual discourse, for expanding the boundaries of tolerance and for healthy mental development.

But if there are people in the universities who resort to arson to make a point, my humble view is let us raze all our universities to the ground, kill or send the professors and lecturers to re-education camps and herd the students to communal farms.

Let us not waste money on education, on development. Since there are still jungles and caves in our country, let us all abandon our Mercedes Benzes, BMWs, Jaguars, Perdanas, Kancils, Kenaris and Krisses and retreat to the jungles and caves.

And we adopt the song Jungle People as our national anthem:

In the darkness of the jungle,
There are many happy people,
Oh, jungle people (oh, jungle people),
We are happy people (we are happy people).