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Events in past months may have changed course of human history

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ONE thing is certain as the year ends and Malaysians prepare to usher in 2002 - events of the past months may have changed the course of history.

Certainly, the events of Sept 11 have left their mark on the United States, and, indeed, the rest of the world.

To a large extent, the manner in which India reacted to attacks on its Parliament, allegedly by Pakistani elements, went back to Sept 11 and the American response to the heinous strikes on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York.

Today, the nuclear neighbours on the Indian sub-continent stand on the brink of war, an eventuality which will benefit neither.

Both the Berita Harian and Utusan Malaysia highlighted Osama bin Laden's taped message to the world on Thursday which reinforced the point that the Al-Qaeda leader was still alive despite speculation to the contrary by certain quarters.

Looking worn and clutching a Kalashnikov, Osama was quoted as warning America that he would continue his fight against the US.

In an editorial related obliquely to the events of Sept 11 the same day, the Berita Harian commented that airlines were now focusing more on the Far East including Malaysia.

The newspaper noted that although there was no direct connection between Qantas Airways' decision to revive flights to Kuala Lumpur and that fateful day in history, there appeared to be a link.

This was probably due to tourists worldwide wanting to steer away from the US and Europe.

The Berita Harian, echoing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's sentiments on the matter, urged Malaysians to prepare for the influx of tourists.

Yesterday's Utusan Malaysia sent home the point that there are lessons to be learnt from 2001.

Stating that the events of Sept 11 made the biggest news for the year, it went on to say that Muslims must understand that they should themselves be masters of their own destiny and not others, including the Americans.

In this respect, the opinion piece by Zin Mahmud on the editorial page stated that Islamic nations of the past were victorious in battles due to their superiority where arms were concerned.

In the same tone, the writer stated that Muslims worldwide did not want a traditional Islamic state as envisioned by Afghan leader Mullah Omar.

The Utusan Malaysia article continued that an impoverished, hungry and weak nation was not the objective of Muslims anywhere. Nor was an Islamic empire stretching from Morocco to Indonesia practical or realistic.

Meanwhile, the Berita Harian front-paged a report headlined "India aims missiles at Pakistan" which stated that guided missiles were in place for any eventuality.

The deployment, confirmed by an Indian Defence Ministry spokesman, spoke volumes of the seriousness of the rift between the two nations.

For the record, Indian and Pakistan were one nation before the latter was created in 1948.

Assassinations not the Malaysian way

MALAYSIANS were shocked on Christmas Day when a report in The Sun newspaper claimed that certain politicians were allegedly planning to assassinate Dr Mahathir and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Berita Harian took a long and hard look at the issue in an editorial on Thursday, stating that assassinations were alien to Malaysian culture.

It underlined the fact that while leaders in the West, which championed freedom, were not allowed free movement in society due to fear of physical harm, Malaysian leaders had always been free to mix with ordinary folk.

This time-honoured tradition, dating back to the time of the first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, should not be sacrificed because of such threats, it added.

It stated that assassinations, which were cowardly and synonymous with some countries, should not be "imported" for the well-being of Malaysians.

The Berita Harian went on to state that the democratic process in place allowed a change of leadership, if indeed there was a need for such.

For the record, The Sun editor-in-chief H'ng Hung Yong and editor Andy Ng resigned in the aftermath of the controversial report. Its chief news editor Robert Ho, reporter R. Manirajan and photographer Anita Md Nasir have been suspended.

The newspaper subsequently carried an apology to Dr Mahathir and Abdullah.

Focus on by-election

THE Chinese Press continued to dwell last week on the political drama in the MCA which appears to have taken a turn for the worse.

Coming just as the Barisan Nasional begins preparations for the by-election in the Indera Kayangan State seat in Perlis, the MCA's woes are high on the list of issues that the Barisan Nasional needs to sort out urgently.

This is in the light of the serious confrontation between the ruling coalition and the Opposition expected in the fight for the State constituency.

The China Press in its Sunday edition last week felt that the best method of resolving the problem within the MCA Youth was to hold an extraordinary general meeting.

It felt that the meeting could be conducted in a fair manner if the election rolls used at the annual general meeting on Aug 3 could be used.

Last Tuesday, the Sin Chew Jit Poh quoted Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib as saying that his party, the backbone of the BN, could intervene in the matter if requested by the MCA.

The former Selangor Menteri Besar, however, was of the opinion that there was still room for the contending factions within the MCA to settle their differences at the negotiating table.

The Sin Chew Jit Poh, the day earlier, had predicted that the by-election would be held at the earliest on Jan 19 and the latest on Jan 26, both days being Saturdays.

It felt that Saturdays would see a good turnout for obvious reasons besides enabling the use of schools as polling centres.

The Tamil Press also gave prominence in its pages to the by-election with the Tamil Nesan congratulating MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu for devising a strategy to ensure all 435 Indian votes go to the BN.

Under the system, 80 MIC members would be charged with the task of garnering all Indian votes in the constituency.

According to the newspaper, this was the most suitable method for the small constituency in the smallest State in the country.

For the record, the Indera Kayangan seat fell vacant following the death of its Assemblyman Datuk Khor Liang Tee of the BN on Dec 19. The Election Commission is expected to meet next week to fix a date for the by-election.

RM20 million for Indians

REPRESENTING only about seven per cent of the population, Indians are a

small community with little economic clout but politically significant beyond their numbers.

Many Indian youths within the community have unfortunately become victim to social ills over time with their involvement in gangsterism, the bane of the community.

It is probably the natural outcome of a situation where they do not have seed money to venture into business or the social background to obtain good jobs.

The Tamil Nesan and the Malaysia Nanban, therefore, welcomed the Government's move to allocate RM20 million to tackle social problems within the Indian community.

The Tamil Nesan said that the funds would go a long way in arresting social ills among Indians.

The newspaper was of the opinion that the allocation could spur greater economic growth within the community.

The Malaysia Nanban went further to state in an editorial that more Government assistance was needed to help poor Indians escape poverty's vicious grip.

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