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Is the pen mightier than the sword?

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IS THE pen really mightier than the sword?

Some people might insist that now it can only be as mighty as the spoken word.

When it comes to raising laughs, I believe, spoken words win easily but then who writes the script? Nowadays, everything is scripted whether about a success or failure.

While on a recent trip to India, I had time for reflection and (reluctantly) came to the conclusion that the old adage was probably correct. However, big money has increasingly become a devastating and potent weapon with the ability to buy even some writers.

I have observed that whom the (allegedly) powerful media criticises may show some considerable powers of resistance, those whom the media sets out to elevate are not always raised. The examples are numerous. In the 1960s, Time magazine predicted Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Musa Hitam not only would become prime minister of Malaysia but also world leaders. Then in the 1990s, the West lobbied and promoted Anwar Ibrahim as it did all over the world those it had handpicked to be its friends and political surrogates.

That notwithstanding, there are people who believe the pen (media) is mightier than the sword. The question is whether in our case it includes the Western pen.

I seek no quarrel with the Western media - I have a long history of fair dealing with it before and after the formation of Malaysia, during the Indonesian confrontation, the run-up to the separation of Singapore and following the May 13 1969 race riots and when Tun Razak became prime minister. Indeed, I have tried to do my bit to bring about good relations between the Western media and Putrajaya.

However, the mistake of some media is that it thinks itself the only worthy medium of communication and we must carry out a policy which it approves to win its favour and the approval of its powerful owners.

It forgets that what forms the emotional and political agenda of the majority of Malaysians is the Malaysian media, especially those using the mediums of Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin, not the Western media nor the English language media. It's a fact.

Malaysia and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad have been favourite targets of a sometimes exceedingly unfair Western media for reasons best known to themselves. We know why.

The Western media, with some exceptions to be fair, has a long history of disbelief and lack of confidence that Malaysia can thrive on its own accord. Even the Straits Times when it was owned and edited by the British was not enthusiastic about Merdeka until late in the day when it realised it was inevitable anyway. It adjusted, though slowly, but two years after Merdeka, largely to escape the PAP government's demand it toe the line, the Straits Times moved its headquarters to Kuala Lumpur. The ownership changed in the early 1970s following an Umno Youth resolution that the British must relinquish ownership to Malaysians.

In British Malaya, the anti-establishment media was run and edited by either the Malays or Chinese in their respective language. There was the Singapore Standard, which was unlike the Straits Times, but it did not last long.

If the Western media reflects the views of its owners, reinforces and

not undermine the Judeo-Christian values and American-European social attitudes, why can't a similar duty be performed by the Malaysian media to reflect, reinforce and not undermine Malaysian values and social and political attitudes without being called names? By the same token, I can also describe the Western media in derogatory terms.

Malaysia is not homogeneous. It is half Bumiputras and the other half the other Malaysians. After 43 years of Merdeka, Malaysians by and large, despite the occasional display of ethnic loyalties which is understandable under some circumstances, I am glad to state that nearly all the second and third generations in particular are loyal Malaysians. They are more interested in their future as Malaysians in Malaysia, not in Indonesia, China, India, Singapore, Australia or the US.

Some Western media is always looking for a story (and not a success story, of course) or an angle in a story to slant, if not to disparage, Malaysia or Dr Mahathir whether it is about the trial of Anwar, its post-trial period, our response to the International Monetary Fund or the unity talk between Umno and Pas because it has a political agenda.

I agree with the editorial of Sunday Star, which says: "Unfair reporting, whether text or pictorial, based on half truth, or facts and figures selected and doctored to suit a certain (chosen) theme, can cause damage and when it is directed at a country or a government, it has intentional ramifications.

"We can quote a string of examples ranging from the haze, street demonstrations, the Anwar trial, Vision schools and even the relocation of a Chinese school in Damansara - that has been reported in a biased way and has affected our standing in the global community."

Its aim is simple and clear; to create an unfavourable impact on our promotional efforts in tourism and investments overseas, and in the long run undermine our political stability. It wants us to go the way of the Philippines and Indonesia which it supports as more democratic than us. It wants us to be poor, chaotic, unstable and irreparably weak like some of our neighbours.

The Prime Minister has every right to be angry - not for the first time and I hope for the last time - and a government which has self-esteem should not just clarify, refute and rebuke the incorrigible Western media. Instead, it should give it the infamous Lee Kuan Yew treatment. It has worked in Singapore and that is no reason why it won't work here or in China.

The antics of the Western media, the latest being Asiaweek, are designed to deliberately denigrate, taunt and torment Dr Mahathir and his government. It has shown little dignity or graciousness because it was out to send tingles of embarrassment throughout Asean and frissons of contempt among the Malaysian public.

Asiaweek's carte blanche in ridiculing the Prime Minister is to produce loathing of Dr Mahathir and to make recovery from it seem impossible.

For years the Western media has treated the Third World as an extension of its owners' neo-imperialist policy. In the case of Malaysia and Dr Mahathir, the decision to cause him grief and drive him out of office was taken when it mandated itself to help the Opposition win the last general election - to punish him for sacking its favourite Malay political leader, Anwar.

The American media and its owners were, and are, convinced that Dr Mahathir is a great obstacle in their quest to write a new script of Malaysian politics and impose their proxies to act in the rewritten play.

I have been a newsman all my life and I know, like everyone else does, that either one takes Asiaweek in his stride or do something to make it less ungracious, patronising, top-lofty and even superfluous in Malaysia.

I agree with Lee that the Western media must not become a partisan in local politics. Asiaweek is distributed in Malaysia on our terms and if it can't accept them, it does not have to sell here.

Otherwise, let it do what harm it can. Then stop whining every time it distorts Malaysia to its Malaysian readers - some 20,000 of them so it claims. Asiaweek is hardly sold in the US nor in Europe. It is largely read in Asean nations only.

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