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It is still terrorism by any other way!

Seri Menanti

DEAR Sir,

For the blurry headed and the ignoramuses, the worst act of terrorism inflicted on others was made on many South-East Asian countries on July 2 1997. The attack started in Thailand followed by Indonesia, then Malaysia, and the Philippines. The attacks left massive trails of misery and suffering.

I am, of course, talking about the speculative currency attacks on these countries following the "deflationary shock from China following the realignment of the Government controlled exchange rate system in the summer of 1994. This had led to a fifty per cent decline in the value of the Chinese yuan".

Pursuant to the "deflationary shock", speculative attacks were instantly made on the currencies of several South-East Asian countries, including Malaysia. They led to the collapse of the so-called Asian Tiger economies.

Following the collapse of many South-East Asian currencies, starting in October 1997, the baht and the rupiah shrank by some 30 per cent against the US dollar. The ringgit and the pesos were down by about 20 per cent against the US dollar.

It has been said that the scale and magnitude of the damage inflicted on the healthy economies of the Asian Tigers then, after the speculative onslaught, was likened to an economic holocaust that left the affected South-East Asian economies in shambles and a state of shock. Some are still struggling to recover from these attacks.

The fall of the rupiah, for example, signalled the beginning of the suffering felt by the people of the affected Indonesian economy, where the destruction of their economy led to chaos. Miseries such as civil war and racial clashes occurred, due to the financial destruction and bankruptcy of many affected by the aftermath of the currency speculative attacks.

In Malaysia, this country's hopes of the long-term prospect of becoming a self-sustaining nation at par with the rest of the developed world were dashed, for a while. These dashed hopes were also due to the ripple effect of the crisis that affected the Japanese economy following the closing down of a major Japanese bank on November 14 1997. The fall of Japan's economy has had an effect on Malaysia's economy.

We, of course, suffered in silence without the help of the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). We, of course, tightened our economic belts and embarked on a long and painful journey to recovery. We did recover, thankfully, with our pride still intact.

Of course in looking back, had we succumbed to pressure and whined for help we would still be in uncertain economic doldrums and may even have been too weak to stave off any further attempts to weaken our sovereignty. In short had we faltered under powerful economic pressure in our quest for a short-term solution to our economic woes, we would have forever been captive to the whims and fancies of the IMF, the World Bank and the superpower.

Had it not been for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's nationalistic stance on the country's economy, we would have seen chaos and disorder. Had he succumbed to pressure to "beg" for help, would we have been in a position to stop any terms and conditions set by those "giving" the assistance? I think not.

Dr Mahathir deserves to be remembered as stubborn, tough, strong,

resilient, and the darring-do type that, without which, we could only dream of being an independent nation in the true essence of the word. The man has led us out of the economic crisis, albeit the slow economic growth, since the speculative attacks on our economy. This man has suggested to the highest world body that a policing was needed to curb the activity of currency speculators of the world.

Although his suggestion was scoffed at as a voice "from a small country trying to act big", today his voice and suggestions have been hijacked by more powerful nations on how to fight economic terrorism to make this a better world to live in. Malaysia, after the currency attacks of 1997, has been advocating, among other things, the policing of activities conducted by speculators such as George Soros. Today, international bodies such as the IMF, and the World Bank are discussing this.

The recent economic meeting of the group of 20 nations, or G-20, in Ottawa, Canada, recently discussed, among other things on the agenda, how to curb "terror financing". It is basically the freezing of US dollars suspected of being used for financing terrorist activities. It had been agreed at the meeting that each country of the G-20 has to set up its own organisation to strictly track down terrorist financing and money laundering and to confiscate the funds. Canada has already frozen some RM2 million worth of suspected terrorists assets in 28 bank accounts.

For the uninitiated, Dr Mahathir had suggested all of topics that were discussed at the recent G-20 meeting in Canada years before the September 11 attacks on the US or the meeting took place. Today, many world leaders have decided that the man was right.

Fortunately, for Malaysia we have a Prime Minister who subscribes to a nationalistic brand of an economic policy. Otherwise we would have been a slave of the IMF, or the World Bank, such as many countries that have had to sell the countries' souls for a quick fix.

As I said in the beginning, call it by any other name, but if an act can destroy millions of lives with a single stroke of a pen, such as the events that led to the major economic crisis in 1997, it is still terrorism. It is as much a terrorist attack as the events in which 4,500 people were killed by terrorist attacks in New York.

I just hope that the US can see the trees for the forest when combating terrorism. George W. Bush is a man who had never ventured out of the US prior to becoming the US President. He must remember that many citizens of the world have suffered from terrorist attacks of some kind or another. He, as a leader of the only superpower left in the world, must be magnanimous enough to exercise restraint when unleashing his military might on any country.

Yours truly,

Seri Menanti

P.S.

In retrospect, it just occurred to me. During the currency crisis affecting the South-East Asian region, I don't remember hearing about the Singapore and Brunei currencies being attacked. Were currency speculators such as Soros sparing them? If so, what was the reason? Just wondering.

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