

26/12/2001

Objectivity or hypocrisy?

IS the Time nuts? Opium in our latte would not have lulled us from the obvious. The one person who, in the words of Time founder Henry Luce, "most affected the news of our lives, for good or ill" this year has got to be Osama bin Laden.

But the magazine editors were moved, or perhaps behooved, to name former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani as Time's Person of the Year. Of course, it is the editors' prerogative and yes, deep inside we all yearn for heroes, but it must be asked: Why depart from the criteria?

What impact could the magazine editors possibly ask for? Going by the secret evidence of President George Bush and his supra-ambassador, Tony Blair, Osama's rhetoric inflamed the damaged imaginations of young men, enough to produce an act of true evil that smashed decades in which America drifted languidly along waters untroubled by the rip tides of history. A man whose impact did not stop at the steel-melting fires, the entombment of thousands of innocent lives, the visual hole in the Manhattan skyline and the hole in America's psyche but who inspired cowboy justice. A military operation of "Infinite Justice" is mounted to hunt down and smoke Osama out; a country is carpet-bombed in his name.

But no, in a wisdom that rises like penises - promising at first in its show of objective strength and critical spirit by debating whether to put Osama in the spot - Time chose a man, who like many other brave citizens of New York, honoured his duties and kept the spirit of the city alive. Still, had he moved the news of our lives in the ways of past "Person of the Year" such as Ayatollah Khomeini, Mao Zedong and Hitler? Time would have done better by giving the award to the people of New York - whose sense of instinctive heroism, communitarianism and volunteerism inspires the world - or the heroes that emerged from the ash and rubble - the firemen, relief workers, police and medical personnel, volunteers and Bronx's gutsy schoolchildren.

Aroused by a man who knew when to be rude and tender, we suspect Time has gone soft. Call it an erectile folly. Or maybe its prejudice makes it blind to the obvious. Its pseudo-populist choice not only mauls the award's criteria but our sense of history. Or could it be that its languor in bypassing Osama shows it is not convinced of Osama's guilt?

Such awards force us to look into the archive of institutions and persons that profoundly define the times of our lives. If we have such an award, no doubt, it would go to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former Permodalan Nasional Berhad chairman Tun Ismail Mohamed Ali.

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