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Speculation indeed the life and spice of Malaysian politics

Sarban Singh

SPECULATION begets speculation. And theories become everyone's daily diet. The imminent Cabinet reshuffle is certainly today's favourite.

In recent weeks, one can see numerous scenarios being painted and more names were being bandied about, while new ministries may be formed. But the only certainty so far seems to be that many political theories have floundered ahead of the imminent Cabinet reshuffle.

The latest casualty seems to be the scenario pertaining to new ministries. This is a scenario which many sections of the media had floated for weeks. Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he had no intention of creating new ministries.

Will that dampen the intensity of the grapevine? A political personality has his doubts. Malaysians are incorrigible when it comes to unleashing political speculations, he said. The frenzy is not about to wane.

It is all very exciting, really. Everyone agrees that Dr Mahathir jealously keeps his thoughts to himself, and that the media risks its credibility when it starts naming names. But this aspect of Press operations has persisted for years.

Still, some scholars may want to write a book on this ingrained habit - a scholarly inspection of the thinking behind the speculations, the energy that drives participants, origins of the speculations, how credence is systematically added to a particular scenario, that sort of stuff.

Logic plays a big part in fuelling specific rumours. At times, there is nothing to support the talk apart from the fact that it seems to make sense.

Take, for instance, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, the former Menteri Besar of Selangor. The media has mentioned the possibility "Mike Tyson", as he is often referred to, will be made a Minister.

Since Dr Mahathir won't tell you or me what is going through his mind, the Mat Taib "logic" seems to rest on a decision the Prime Minister made in 1990.

He brought Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi back into the Cabinet after Umno members re-elected Pak Lah as one of the party's top leaders (vice president). Mat Taib is in a similar position.

Herein lies the inherent strength of speculators - the ability (or willingness) to completely ignore drawbacks.

Unlike Pak Lah then, Mat Taib is not an MP. Neither has he been appointed a Senator.

"Don't be ridiculous, he can be made a Senator," sniffed a hard-nosed backer of the Mat Taib formula.

"Has anybody checked the availability of senatorships?" asked a political commentator who methodically scrunitises the strength of the logic for every name mentioned.

That Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman is a Senator but not a State Assemblyman did not discourage another group of speculators who insisted that the ulama was about to be made Menteri Besar of Kedah.

That didn't materialise. The Prime Minister said Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain would remain Menteri Besar.

Logic also dictates speculators' move to "transfer" Datuk Dr Rais Yatim from Putrajaya (where he is Minister in the Prime Minister's Department) to Wisma Putra.

After all Rais was Foreign Minister in 1987 when he left the Cabinet

following a contest in Umno.

Miraculously, the reshuffle, from the vantage point of the grapevine, has been expanding. Lately, some Menteri Besar have been dragged into the picture.

And as usual, there are those who suggest this Cabinet reshuffle will be major. But wasn't that what they said each time?

And how about when the Prime Minister was expected to announce this reshuffle after chairing the last Umno Supreme Council meeting? The logic? Pak Lah was named Deputy Prime Minister after a similar meeting. Speculators chose to ignore the obvious fact that Pak Lah's appointment was largely an Umno matter.

Even now, many speculators must be rubbing their palms with glee at what they see as fresh leads dangling about. And would anyone dare say they would be wrong?

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