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The 'hot property' must be clean

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IF the test of leadership is to perform well in a crisis, one or two Umno leaders have failed (even in a minor crisis) miserably, I am sorry. Publilius Syrus said more than two thousand years ago that "anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm".

He who wants to govern others must first be the master of himself. How can he if he is beholden to so many people?

The next Prime Minister we get is the country we get.

In American political terminology, "hot property" is an attractive candidate (for whatever post, normally presidential), as seen by his patron or his political sponsors and supporters. In one word, he is a comer.

At the KLSE, it is an IPO which is oversubscribed and highly sought after.

So who is the hot property "waiting in the wings"? According to the Sunday Times diarist he is Y.B. Muhammad Tulus. I agree with him that Y.B. Muhammad Tulus is the hottest upcoming political property on the Malaysian horizon, unless circumstances change drastically.

Y.B. Muhammad Tulus believes in the politics of inclusion, not exclusion, a new politics of meaning; a new Malaysian ethos. He has made the practice of politics respectable, worthy of Thomas Burke's definition of a politician; "It is the business of a politician, who is the philosopher in action, to find out proper means towards these ends, and to employ them with effect."

Y.B. Muhammad Tulus is a far cry from the derogation of what Shakespeare says in Richard III, "merely a politician, and studied only his own ends", which many voters and younger members of Umno believe is the case with Y.B. Zig Zag, the outcome of a survey conducted by a private pollster.

Burke was an English parliamentarian in the nineteenth century, not to be confused with the statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke whose Reflections on the French Revolutions, was one of his popular works.

In the Malaysian context, Y.B. Muhammad Tulus is a celebrity, a public figure whereas Y.B. Zig Zag is a mere political figure, an office holder, a professional politician, a technician without ideology nor committed to anyone else except to himself; as an old politician, he knows enough ropes to hang himself - politically speaking.

I admire President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo who ruthlessly nipped in the bud an attempt to seize power by supporters of her jailed predecessor, Joseph Estrada, after they failed to win the backing of the military. She then visited Estrada in his maximum security jail!

Estrada, Al Gore and Abdurrahman Wahid were early supporters of the so-called reformasi movement in our country and look what has happened to Estrada and Al Gore. Abdurrahman is fighting for his political life. Al Gore has disappeared into oblivion, last reported to be teaching journalism, Estrada is accused of plundering his nation and Gus Dur, Abdurrahman's other name, has been censured by Parliament for the second time over two corruption scandals, bringing him a step closer to possible impeachment.

The moral of the story is, don't meddle in other people's affairs when you can barely manage your own housekeeping and the general state of your nation is in tatters.

Arroyo said, "I was hoping they (the anti-government forces) would act

(to seize power) so I could crush them." Strong and brave words from a small woman who appears to want to be the "Filipino Mrs Thatcher".

I hasten to say that Dr Mahathir's government is the most tolerant in Asean against street protesters (until the recent arrests by the police of organisers of street demonstrations) even though many of the demonstrators and their leaders passed the limits of tolerance a long time ago.

They had inflicted fear, terror and anxiety on the people every weekend during the past three years.

There is, as Tony Blair warned British protesters recently, "a right way to protest in a democracy and there is a wrong way". In our experience, it is the wrong way and for the wrong reason.

In Malaysia, street demonstrations had not only hurt small business but had tarnished the image of democracy. Democracy is not a licence to do what one likes. Maybe peaceful protest is a vital part of our democratic process but if it is repeatedly held to keep alive "spurious causes", I am against it.

The Government at long last gave the police "total backing" against anti-government demonstrations organised by the "fanatic fringe". The public rallied behind the police.

In Malaysia, unlike in the United States, a demonstration is not a demonstration but a show of political might and an offensive. The demonstration - like the March on Washington in 1963 - was a moral protest against racial segregation and by nightfall the demonstrators departed for their homes; it was a powerfully moving peaceful event, held not to support a person or an icon, but to support a civil rights Bill.

The Keadilan and other Opposition leaders, I am sure, realise that. I find it strangely heartening that the behaviour or misbehaviour of the demonstrators has damaged the "causes" they have been espousing, through overkill.

The condemnation of street demonstrations and protests, though late, by Dr Chandra Muzaffar, deputy president of Keadilan, is welcome.

The demonstrators and protesters may be muddled and naive in the main, but a few are every bit as malevolent as painted by the police. They cannot hope to topple the Government via street demonstrations unless they can get the widest possible public opinion along with them. I don't believe they can.

Here is my two cents' worth of advice to the Opposition. Street demonstrations, picketing and sometimes direct action do not achieve a change. Instead, a picture that they are arrogant, childishly irrational and a great nuisance is conveyed to the rakyat who are sick and tired of interruptions during the weekend.

Why should the demonstrators make the Opposition less credible while, posturing about democratic process, they also condone illegal assemblies?

If Umno (and MCA, too) stopped engaging in a bout of internecine introspection, the Opposition - DAP and Keadilan in particular - could have become MCA's (DAP) and Umno's (Keadilan) secret weapons.

The Opposition always talks about transparency, democratic process, and fairness. Have the opposition parties examined their own records about all this in their party management?

The Opposition has come across in many people as less than fair - in the case of DAP to their handful Malay and numerous Indian members and Keadilan to the non-Malays? Are their meetings and elections as democratic and open as Umno's?

Any political party that lacks transparency and a strong direction in Opposition, will not impress the voters to vote them into office. They have time left to correct that impression, but they won't because they can't. Their leaders' minds no longer watch ideologies because their

thoughts appear to be concentrated on themselves!

The Opposition's mistake (and a continuing one) is to treat all government leaders as morons - well, a few are. But, in any government we have to have some foolish persons and they also exist in the Opposition. Otherwise, politics will be infuriatingly dull. Politics, too, must be spiced with the presence of jokers.

In Putrajaya lives a bomoh whose decision, as it were, can make the weather, and if he is strong enough, change the climate, too. I will treat him gingerly, if I were an opposition politician.

When the time is propitious, I am sure, he will unveil a series of political proposals which will alter the image of the Government among the voters, old and new.

Whatever happens, Umno must return to the battlefield, or turun padang as the Kok Lanas folks say.

Learn from Marshal Foch's heroic message during the Battle of the Marne in 1914, "My centre is giving way, my right is retreating; situation excellent, I shall attack!"

The world would not have remembered Foch's words had he not been right. The message made an eventual Allied victory inevitable.

Like Foch, Umno and Dr Mahathir have no choice but to attack. But such an offensive is winnable only if they have a coherent strategy to persuade the electorate to return to the fold.

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