

27/12/2001

The mocking of a killing

Shamsul Akmar

THERE was a gem of an advertisement put up by Petronas for Hari Raya.

A boy and his sister walked along a stretch of beach waiting for their fisherman father who had gone out during the monsoon and had not returned as promised. The boy, shouted ombak jahat, basically, calling the waves cruel for not allowing his father to return. Then he decided to baca doa (pray) to God, asking for divine intervention to bring his father back.

The boy's doa was makbul (fulfilled) and the father returned.

As they celebrated his return by having nasi ayam (chicken rice) at a village stall, the boy noticed a news report on television about the plight of refugee children, either in Afghanistan or Palestine. That led to the boy to baca doa again, and this time around, he prayed for the fathers of those children to return and be able to celebrate Hari Raya with them.

For many, such a depiction would surely tug their heartstrings. But the images displayed in the advertisement conjure much sense of being glad for whatever little one may have in his or her life, if arrogance and ego did not get into the way.

That was for Hari Raya. For Christmas, a local English daily decided to put on its front page a report of a plot to assassinate Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. It grabbed much attention, be it that of fellow journalists from other media, politicians or other members of the public.

Some reacted disbelievingly while others seemed to give much weight to it. But the reactions from the Prime Minister and the police to the report seem to reflect that the report may very well be a comedy of error.

As it is, top police personnel seemed to be in the dark about it though the daily quoted sources from the force.

Dr Mahathir's reaction on the report is quite ambivalent especially for one purported to be on the hit list of an assassination plot.

While newspapers are known to have got things wrong, it is the disbelief of such report which is of interest.

However, if such a report was highlighted two or three years ago, it is doubtful that the nation, if not all, at least half of it, would have taken it seriously. The question is why such opposing reactions eventhough the time frame is only over three years?

It is believable then because the nation at that time was trapped in a vicious and aggressive political uncertainties. It was a time when street demonstrators are taken as brave people, not only by some of the locals but also by a leader from the US.

Eventhough many of the protagonists denied they were promoting violence and hatred, their mannerisms speak otherwise. In fact then, even Dr Mahathir himself did not dismiss the promotion of hatred and calls for his blood being made by his political enemies.

That was then. Much water had flowed under the bridge and today, despite the continuous promotion of politics of hate, no one would want to be associated with the idea of promoting political assassinations.

No doubt, the September 11 tragedy contributed much to this. On the converse, leaders of political parties are definitely aware that using hate for political expediency can only last for as long as the furnace burns.

And the hate furnace does not burn very long. Political leaders in

Malaysia are very much aware of this. While they try to ensure that the hate continues to burn, issues are being sought to keep their political opponents under siege.

More than that, if three years ago, the establishment is condemned for its political decisions, the economic uncertainties helped fan the hatred. The establishment's move to adopt unconventional economic strategies which were widely criticised by the international community indirectly supported the cause of its critics.

But today, despite the economy struggling to regain its footing due to global uncertainties, some of the critics to the unconventional economic approaches are singing a different tune. And those who were uncomfortable to defend the establishment for fear of being described as government apologists are beginning to speak out with more confidence.

On the other end, the vocal local critics, realising that the foreign support have changed their tune, too decided to mince their words. These changes in the Malaysian political and economic landscape, change the perceptions and attitude of the citizenry.

Many are still opposing the establishment and that is a right well exercised. But it is no more a case of frothing at the mouth. Some are slowly extending constructive criticisms which would be to the Government's advantage if it adopts a pro-active stance.

In short, the citizenry is riding the wave. They too are alert that other nations are hit too by more powerful waves and quite a number were submerged.

Malaysia had survived that wave, barely or otherwise, rightly so or luckily, depending on how the people choose to perceive it.

But the little boy in the Petronas advert would, upon his father's return, surely stop accusing the waves as jahat. Simply because, he saw bigger waves swallowing the existence of others elsewhere.

(END)