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Time for Malays to stop brooding

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SOME years ago, when Datuk Johan Jaaffar was the editor-in-chief of the Utusan Melayu Group of newspapers, he and I were invited to visit Taiwan. It was our first visit there.

It was an exciting time to be in Taiwan. The Taiwanese brand of democracy had just been born. The politicians, including Members of Parliament, regularly punched each other silly in the chamber when they were through abusing each other verbally.

It is funny that seemingly (or supposedly) intelligent people would do the most undemocratic or even uncivilised things in the name of democracy.

Look at what is happening in the Philippines and Indonesia today. First they remanded democracy. To get it, they resorted to demonstrations, which often turned violent and bloody. They legitimised violence, by using lofty slogans such as "People Power" and "Reformasi" (reformation).

When they finally got their democracy or so they thought, they took to the streets to demand the resignation of their democratically-elected presidents. They cannot wait for the next election or to put their accused leaders on trial.

But it was not the infantile behaviour of the Taiwanese MPs that became the highlight of our visit to the island. Rather the long talk we had while being taken on a slow drive along the traffic-clogged highways in and around Taipei.

It was a dark, brooding day. The skies were cloudy and I was secretly hoping for a typhoon to make the visit really memorable.

We translated the brooding day into Bahasa Malaysia and called it "hari yang meragam". When a person broods, she or he usually knows neither the reason why she or he feels that way nor how to get over the depression.

Today, pardon me for saying it, the Malays - not all of course - are going through this experience. They are angry and unhappy with all kinds of things which they cannot pinpoint. So they brood.

The outburst against the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Umno, the Government and the long-ended New Economic Policy, as reported by some newspapers on Monday was, to my mind, the product of brooding Malays.

When someone broods, she or he cannot think clearly. A brooding person is often resentful.

Not surprisingly, the gathering in Kuala Lumpur of the so-called Malay Action Front last Sunday turned from defending Malay rights to criticising Dr Mahathir and things he is associated with.

Not that criticising Dr Mahathir or the NEP was such a big sin. The man is all too familiar with detractions and the NEP has been condemned by others before.

But what really matters is while the enemies of the Malays, perceived or real, were not confronted, the assembly was turned into a forum for venting anger on fellow Malays.

The incident should tell the Malays that they should not be too caught up with dog-matic slogans such as Ketuanan Melayu (Malay as the master race of Malaysia), Melayu Baru (the new Malays) and Tak Akan Melayu Hilang Di Dunia (The Malays will not disappear from the surface of the earth).

The last was purportedly declared by Hang Tuah, the legendary Malay warrior of the Malacca Empire, which incidentally was used as the battle cry of the MAF.

Hang Tuah was nearly wrong. Although the Malays did not disappear from the surface of the earth, the empire collapsed soon after and the Malays became the hamba (servants) to successive European masters for 446 years.

The Malays will do better if they believe less in slogans and political swashbuckling and more in the spirit of competition - the healthy and productive type.

It is useful to remind ourselves that we live no longer in the Malay World, the Chinese World and the Indian World. We are living in Dunia Maya - the virtual world, the world driven not by slogans but by the computing power of Microsoft and Intel.

Let us stop brooding. Stop blaming the NEP. Every single Malay who attended the MAF assembly had gained from the policy. So have millions of others.