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Cooking up a controversy

THE disturbances in Indonesia over Malaysia's legal action against illegal aliens will not stop Malaysia from stamping out the flow of illegal migration from any country.

The miasma of confusion over Malaysia's conduct of her sovereignty arose because of the political bankruptcy of some Indonesian politicians and media. No doubt, it is not reflective of its Government's stand. But, frankly, it is a national diversion that Indonesia can do without for its politicians should be seeking solutions for its economic woes, not inventing bogeymen.

Pickled in self-doubt, these 'O My beloved country' politicians are proving to be sensationalists, feasting on the people's misplaced emotions and drowning the republic's official stand on the non-issue to postpone their political redundancy. The likes of politician Rodjil Ghufron, People's Welfare Minister Yusuf Kalla and Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda are eclipsed by the "gampang-minded" politicians for whom the "Enemy" - a nationally captivating doppelganger - is a pre-requisite for survival.

And don't forget Indonesia's king-maker, patron of street demonstration and Speaker of the People's Consultative Council, Amien Rais, who has exploited the issue in his bid for the presidential race in 2004. We saw Amien's small-minded petulance in his Aug 18 speech when he accused Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of playing with fire and now, in contrast to the Indonesian Government's official stand, in his welcome of Malaysia's caution to Malaysians to refrain from travelling to Indonesia until the tempest there subsides.

The covert rationale of harvesting hate in its near economic wasteland? The more time they spend on burning our Jalur Gemilang, the less time they have to worry about the republic's problems. And several of its media pander to the domestic lobbies. It is the same old script with the subtext of militant nationalism and extra-territorial temptation: The blame-it-all-on Malaysia ploy and the threat of a replay of the "Crush Malaysia" front in 1963-66. Indonesia's connoisseurs of political semiotics would always rekindle the confrontation years, but then they are rooted in the vagaries of the Sukarno era. The neo-literates in history should be sobered by the fact that it would all come to grief.

We appreciate the legal migrant workers' contributions to our economy, and will continue to welcome hardworking, legal labour. But they do not deserve exemption from our laws just because of shared cultural and linguistic roots. Malaysia is not a subsidiary state of Indonesia. We do not require the political consensus of the likes of Amien in the conduct of our affairs. Nor will we tolerate any push towards coercive diplomacy to make us ease our immigration laws. Interference in one's sovereign affairs could be injurious to any bilateral relations.

Indonesia would do well to remember the words of US President John F. Kennedy: "Civility is not a sign of weakness." Malaysia's civility should not be taken for granted. If, unlike Amien, the Indonesian Government believes that Malaysia's travel advisory is unwarranted, then it should be seen to do its best to contain the flagrant exhibition of ill-feeling towards Malaysia.