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No one to blame but themselves

THE Malays are not safe. Disturbing as it is, it goes to the heart of the state of affairs in the Malay community. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would fail his responsibility as president of Umno - the guardian of collective Malay, Islamic and national interests - if he were to downplay the gravity of the plight confronting today's Malays.

The diagnosis: The Malays are still weak, backward and the poorest. As posed by Dr Mahathir, take away the Chinese and all that they have built and own, and we are left with the imagery of a wasteland occupied by the wretched sons of the soil. Harsh but true.

The reality is that the depth of the Malay crisis is poorly understood; its ramification underestimated. For far too long the Malays have been taking their political hegemony for granted, misguided by the illusion that the political power will inevitably pass from one Malay to another. But as cautioned by Dr Mahathir during the Umno general assembly, "Do not assume that after Umno, Pas will form the Government (for) in politics, the unexpected can happen." A divided Malay landscape where political hatred reigns over brotherhood in Islam will eventually herald a political wasteland for the Malays.

Religious organicism - an organic representation of religious collectivity by one party as is the case with Pas - has wrought much disunity and mangled the understanding of Islam. No doubt, some will argue that Pas is free to negotiate the country's civic space with its religio-political ideology. But this misses the point. It is religious organicism, whether expressed flagrantly by Datuk Abdul Awang Hadi or in Pas' conventional synecdoche that folds away all Malay spiritual and political duties into the narrow agenda of a theocratic state, that most needs to be repudiated. Its polluting and crippling effects on Malay political life have never been more visible, thanks partly to the gullibility of some Malays.

We have seen how a political discourse centred on hate-mongering and the black-and-white dicta from the closure of ijtehad (independent reasoning) as its sole, unequivocal criterion of good and bad, right and wrong, truth and falsity has nurtured a variety of demagogues, hustlers and charlatans. And they all mingle banalities, half-truths, distortions and falsehoods to buttress their narrow, political ends. In the process, they not only betray the struggles of the Malays but turned Islam into a gutter religion. There is room for political dissent and differences. But as Dr Mahathir said, it "should not result in violent enmity such as to prevent co-operation totally, to perform religious observances together and to close ranks when threatened by outside enemies".

Enough with the dialectics of Malay-Islam and the Islamic state. The Malays must engage in self-demystification to understand why greatness of civilisation still evades the race. In addition to Dr Mahathir's intellectual reflections in *The Malay Dilemma* and *The Challenge* on the psychocultural flaws of the Malays, we share his contention that the socially-ill Malay pathology is a product of dysfunctional families and uncommitted teachers.

As gleaned from Dr Mahathir's speech, we would emphasise the following. First, the post-NEP Malays should not wholly embrace the victim status that results in blaming all failings on other races, the elites and the Government. Second, they should not harbour a blind loyalty to narrow

religio-racial ideology since this will bind them to the pathological aspects of Malay behaviour and attitude. Third, they should not truncate any discourse regarding the plight of the Malays by censoring or denying critical perspectives, to borrow Dr Mahathir's words, exposing the exposed.

The Malays must return to their cultural values and Islamic teachings. The Government's affirmative action was never meant to infantilise the race. Self-help and, yes, bootstrap capitalism, will add respect and honour to the Malays' collective civic self. The Malays must rise to the challenges of self-help and competition. Umno, on its part, has optimism of the will but it should not be hindered by a pessimism of the intellect and ponderous action.

The Malays must regain their self-esteem by returning to the correct path: United they stand, divided they fall.

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