

India gives Mahathir a lesson on true democracy
MalaysiaKini.com
January 16,2012
Amused

Last month, Dr Mahathir gave a speech in India which stirred one Indian activist to retort in an open letter to the doctor, titled 'Dr M, in India we have bad roads but true democracy' by Siddharthya Swapan Roy .

The author is a freelance writer and activist based in Maharashtra. The article is reproduced below in full:

Dear Dr Mahathir,

A couple of days back I woke up to newspaper reports which quoted you as saying that India's democracy is a hindrance to its development and, if we did away with the nuisance of democracy, we will become developed.

Well, sir, it is heartening to see your concern about India's future, especially now that our own elected government has orphaned us. To read that someone from the outside cares about our development sounds so very nice.

But you see, sir, your (apparently) good intentions notwithstanding, your advice to Indians is, well how should I put it... ill-advised.

I'm not really sure if you know much about the history of our nation. Don't get me wrong.

Going by facts like the general absence of news from Malaysian newspapers; the absence of anything but song and dance in your electronic media; the absence of bookstores that sell knowledgeable books (for example, ones from which you can learn about history and not how to get rich in six steps); the abundance of malls and the stark absence of libraries; the abundance of coaching centres that can make masseurs, air hostesses and a host of quick-fix technicians and the relative absence of centres of higher learning especially in the social sciences; and, above all, the fact that this insanely consumerist and hedonist Malaysia was made under your tutelage, makes me doubt your knowledge of the history of India or any nation for that matter.

So allow me to apprise you of the story of our independence.

We won independence from colonial rulers waging a long and tortuous battle. A battle that sought to replace a discriminatory, unjust and violent regime that had enslaved huge populations with one which was based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

India was home then, as is now and as will always be, to an immense diversity of people who spoke different tongues, prayed to different Gods, wore different clothes and had different political beliefs. These diverse people said to each other that – we, despite our differences, will strive to live and flourish together and make a sovereign nation which will be democratic, socialist and secular.

We did not anywhere say that we want to be Malaysia or for that matter China or the US.

In India, no one is above the law

We want to become a nation with a system that treats all its citizens as equal unlike your country that officially accords special rights to Malay Muslims calling them first-class citizens while relegating thousands of people of Tamil, Chinese and other ethnic origins.

Despite the fact that they have known no other land than Malaysia as their own, you denigrate them with

the tag of being second-class citizens.

We try to work towards having a system wherein a person will grow according to his merit and hard work earning what she or he has rightfully earned.

You may be surprised to know that here in India making cartels based on identity, even if under the name of a holy cow called "Bumiputra" or son of the soil is looked down upon by most of us.

Here, promoting the selective interests of one's self or that of his kin is called corruption and nepotism and not, as you call it, development.

We are in fact fighting tooth and nail to arrest the scourge of corruption and (you'll be shocked to know) get the guilty punished.

Here in India no one is above the law and many a times powerful public figures go to jail for being corrupt or subverting the law.

Now that we are at it, sir, I'm sure it would be interesting to know what the minorities of your country have to say – especially the jailed and beaten ones – about the development-democracy debate.

In fact, sir, your idea of development is largely at odds with many of us here.

Development is no substitute for values

What you did to the tropical forests and water bodies of Malaysia (that is, raze vast acres of them into oblivion to make way for big-buck oil palm plantations and piggeries and so on) would cause huge outrage among many of us who are looking for sustainable development.

We are yet to be unanimously convinced that making cemented roads – however broad, lining them with buildings, even if glass-covered and glossy, and putting cars on them, however fast – is a substitute for our valued bio-diversity.

Many of us are very convinced that displacing huge populations of native people for useless things like racing tracks is a blot on the word "development".

There are many of us who find it a shameful and cruel hypocrisy that while your country has abundant and openly advertised sex tourism, it still whips women for being licentious!

Thanks to the culture of reading here, many of us know of your penchant for cruelty in your personal career.

A career during which you enacted despotic and violent acts at times in the name (your contorted version of) Islam and at times in the name of security and national interest.

We could recount how you rose to power annihilating huge numbers of your opponents and stayed there for over two decades, continuing your devious rule using tactics and schemes which are far beyond Machiavelli.

Many of us know about your vile Internal Security Act, which you used to crush political opposition – jailing them and putting in place a frail and near-sham democracy and placing the entire nation under a one-man rule of Umno for over two decades.

You will note that I have used words like "most of us", "many of us" and have tried to stay away from absolute claims.

Misconstrued understanding of 'development'

Besides the age-old Indian practice of accommodating different opinions, it is meant to recognise that there are people in this country, too, who think like you and will have applauded you for saying what you did.

They, too, think that roads are all that important and not the humans who walk on them or the ones who sleep beside them.

They have misconstrued the word development as development of personal wealth and that this “development” is a holy cow and everything including the rights and lives of fellow humans is of lesser priority.

Their money power helps them buy a lot of print space and electronic bandwidth so they may appear like the majority, but thankfully the truth is they aren't.

The majority of us recognise and are willing to admit – and even discuss at length – that there are problems in our nation – including bad roads.

But they'll quickly add that we intend to solve those not by lessening democracy but by increasing it.

- Siddharthya Swapan Roy

The above article was sent to me by a friend. The article depicts the true Malaysian scenario. To start off check out the prevailing mentality of a section of our community. 'Cerai lsteri kerana longgar' - this was headline news in a local newspaper recently.

The paper knows what thrills people. In other cultures, this would have made people vomit knowing there are more important matters at hand for the papers to report.

Its very regrettable to know thousands of our children leave school without being able to speak a word in English - a vital international medium for educational, social and economic growth. No grand transformation program can work without English.

An ocean of knowledge is available in English. Regard it like a computer. Without it there is no progress. Even whatever progress is made is aided by the presence of English in key areas such as the Registrar of Companies and the legal system.

For heaven sake realise that when you cannot guarantee the next meal for a child, at least give him the tools for survival. The vast population of school leavers and university graduates are stupid by international standards. Don't play with the future of the children.

They know nothing. As elders, we have the responsibility to provide for them in this competitive world.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/186751>