

From democracy to doctatorship
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Even from its birth, Malaysia's prospects of developing into a thriving democracy were none too bright. And no wonder, conceived as it was in a sordid tryst between its British colonial masters and their neo-colonialist bedmates in the so-called Alliance, now known as Barisan Nasional.

But however misbegotten, Malaysia's infant democracy wasn't altogether illegitimate. In fact, thanks to its inheritance of a healthy constitution and thriving civil institutions, it had loads of potential to grow to strong, intelligent and respectable maturity.

But then the redoubtable Dr Mahathir Mohamad got on its case. And for 22 years, in direct contravention of his medical duty to "do no harm to the patient", subjected Malaysia's formerly promising, if far from thriving, democracy to such crippling doses of repression, corruption and outright criminality as to turn it into his personal doctatorship.

Many of us, appalled as we were at the results of such monstrous political malpractice, hoped that the doctor's successor, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, might honour his promise to restore Malaysia's sorely-depleted democratic system back to health.

But unfortunately, even his weak and half-hearted attempts at resuscitating the depleted, diseased democracy that had been left in his charge inspired Mahathir to give Abdullah a dose of the same medicine that he'd been prescribing for all those who opposed him.

Latest poisonous pronouncement

And as he is still doing to his foes to this day, Mahathir's latest poisonous pronouncement is that the US and Israel are plotting regime-change in Malaysia, using Anwar Ibrahim as their puppet.

Four years ago, however, as if in ignorance of the fact that Malaysian democracy had already suffered a surfeit of medical, indeed madical care, Australia's Curtin University up and awarded Abdullah Badawi an honorary doctorate.

What on earth Abdullah had done to deserve this 'honour' I have no idea. But now that I think back on it, considering that the only thing he was famous for during his premiership was napping on the job, and that his honorary doctorate that was in technology, maybe it was sleep technology that Curtin had in mind.

But the biggest question in my mind is not about the rationale for such an award, beyond the obvious one of a quid pro quo for regime support of its campus in Malaysia, but why any Australian university worthy of its name would give encouragement to the head of a doctatorship in the first place.

Why would any institution allegedly devoted to learning, enlightenment and intellectual freedom so endanger its reputation, demean its staff, shame its students, alienate its alumni, and in general make a total looniversity of itself by awarding a doctorate to some anti-democratic dick-head?

Just as Australia's Monash University did early last year in conferring a doctorate on Abdullah Badawi's successor and current Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Abdul Razak.

And that Curtin has done recently and even more ludicrously, if possible, in conferring an honorary Doctor of Letters degree on Najib's shopaholic spouse and self-styled "First Lady of Malaysia", Rosmah Mansor.

What on earth is going on here? Is Australia, through the agency of selected looniversities, the

controversial Lynas rare-earth refinery and the now mercifully defunct 'Malaysian solution' to its boat-people problem, conspiring to support the perpetuation of the Umno/BN doctatorship?

Publicity campaign not working too well

Or are these doctorates for himself and his consort just another symptom of the "I help you, you help me" system of bribery and back-scratching that Najib Razak has raised to such a pitch of perfection during his time in office?

Or else, could such questions be entirely academic in light of Najib's clearly evident desperation to spin-doctor himself and his sick regime back to some semblance of political health by whatever possible means, including undeserved PhDs?

Not that this grossly expensive publicity campaign appears to be working too well. In fact, it seems to be having a reverse effect, in that the reputations of media and institutions that Najib employs for his spin-doctoring suffer more than his own is improved.

Far from glorifying Najib and Rosmah's 'good' names, honorary PhDs from Monash and Curtin only serve to tarnish the reputations of these no doubt otherwise excellent universities.

Just as, rather than improving the image of Malaysia's doctatorship in the eyes of the world, the fraudulent 'documentaries' produced by FBC Media at such massive cost to Malaysian taxpayers have so damaged the independent, impartial image of the BBC that it has seen the need to issue a formal on-air apology to viewers for having aired them.

And Malaysia's mainstream media have been misused and abused for so long for the express purpose of Umno/BN spin-doctoring that they're as good as dead in the eyes of anyone but a total innocent or outright idiot.

Even more damaging to Najib's frantic and wildly expensive spin-doctoring of public perception on his own and his regime's behalf is that the facts so eloquently expose it as false.

It doesn't take a PhD to see that Umno/BN sin-doctoring rages unabated, with the electoral system still illegally stacked against the opposition, Anwar Ibrahim still facing a prosecution appeal on the regime's fake sodomy charge against him, and still no sign whatever of just resolutions to countless other sores still festering on the face of Malaysian justice, most notably the Teoh Beng Hock and Altantuya Shaariibuu cases.

No end to the spin-doctoring

And of course there's no end to Umno/BN spin-doctoring, the siphoning-off of public funds by every conceivable means from Abdul Taib Mahmud-style land and timber grabs to graft-riddled defence purchasing, plunder-prone public projects like the PKFZ, Low-Cost Airport Terminal and MRT extension, pirated privatisations like that of MAS, power and water suppliers and the one apparently planned for Felda, and 'soft loans' to cronies as in the current NFC scandal.

Even more ominous for anyone entertaining hopes of an end to the Umno/BN doctatorship is that, behind Najib Razak's spin-doctoring of himself as a "transformer" and a "moderate", his stated mission is "even if our bodies are crushed and our lives lost, brothers and sisters, whatever happens, we must defend Putrajaya".

Which brings me to the thought that, as long as some Australian universities have seen fit to 'honour' Najib and his wife, what about an honorary PhD for Najib's cousin and enforcer, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein?

This is the man, after all, responsible for Umno/BN's police, MACC and other agencies that routinely treat

'suspects' to the third degree, and for generally ensuring the security of the doctatorship by rallying forces like Rela in case the "crushed bodies and lost lives" crunch ever comes.

Better yet, as long as they've all already utterly devalued datukships by securing so many of them for themselves and their cronies, what about honorary doctorates for not just Hishammuddin, but for all Umno/BN big-noters?

Because it suddenly strikes me that such awards could be intended as more of a hex than a help. Maybe there's method in Monash and Curtin universities' apparent madness, and they're covertly working against the Umno/BN doctatorship while appearing to support and encourage it.

The "Monash" moniker, after all, both contains and powerfully conveys the message of "ash" as in "ABU". And the name "Curtin" could well be perceived as predicting the regime's future to be "curtains", in its colloquial sense of The End.

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