

**Gov't's tired strategy: Blame the foreigners**  
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The recent summoning by the Malaysian foreign affairs minister of the high commissioner of the Republic of Singapore to Malaysia on June 22, 2012, to protest the alleged participation of three Singapore diplomats in the Bersih 3.0 sit-in demonstration on April 28, 2012, is particularly worrying for several reasons.

Firstly, it marks a clear attempt by the powers-that-be to distract and draw attention away from the principal issue of clean, free and fair elections, and instead seek to rally the support of Malaysians to oppose the supposed involvement of a foreign government in the domestic affairs of Malaysia.

This is a classic "scare" tactic, and is one of the oldest tricks in the book.

The idea is to draw together Malaysians of different political persuasions and to unite them in opposition to a common (foreign) enemy, in this case our southern neighbour Singapore.

What better way to paper over the fractures and fissures of Malaysian politics by saying that differing sides must join together to oppose our traditional rivals Singapore, who are trying to interfere in and influence our electoral process, and, by extension, the outcome of the next general elections.

It re-ignites memories, but only if you are old enough, of the participation of the People's Action Party in peninsular Malaysia in the general elections of 1964 with their slogan of a 'Malaysian Malaysia', and Singapore's subsequent departure in 1965 when things got too much.

So mention Singapore and one is able to tap into the vein of a long and rich history of disagreements between the two countries - on land, sand, water and airspace encroachments, to name a few.

It is interesting that when the prime minister's '1Malaysia' policy was announced, one of the parallel documents issued by the government was an explanation of how '1Malaysia' differed from 'Malaysian Malaysia', such is the strength of the ghosts from 1964.

But not only Singapore has been targeted; so too has Indonesia.

Witness for example the recent incidents where Indonesians reportedly damaged the Malaysia Hall building and protested outside the gates of the Malaysian Embassy in Jakarta on 22nd June in a dispute as to the origins and ownership of certain cultural heritage, and how these are being characterised as anti-Malaysian.

The Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to Malaysia was summoned to Wisma Putra for our concerns to be registered.

There are also the attempts to paint the Indonesians as being wholly unreasonable in the matter of the employment of domestic workers.

There is no better way to persuade the middle class to support the present government

than by showing that it is prepared to stand up for their right to employ an Indonesian domestic worker with minimum fuss and salary, and a guarantee of a full refund if she should run away.

Potential backlash

What is also interesting is why other foreign missions have not been similarly chastised.

Singapore was not the only foreign mission that sent its representatives to monitor events on the ground during the Bersih 3.0.

Could it be that the powers-that-be do not wish to risk any potential backlash from these other governments, especially when we have signed or hope to be signing major free trade agreements with some of them.

If so, it makes the targeting of the three Singapore diplomats seem much more of a deliberate and orchestrated, if crude, attempt to raise tensions for ulterior motives.

Secondly, it shows how bankrupt of ideas the present government actually is.

There is nothing more simple than to appeal to our innate sense of patriotism to entrance and enchant us to put to one side the issues of the day.

We see this being done every year from Merdeka Day to Malaysia Day, when numerous flag-waving advertisements appear in print and on television.

The current unofficial election campaign which has already started on billboards and television has numerous images of federal government leaders with the Jalur Gemilang in the background.

So instead of a serious consideration and analysis of the actual issues, the trick is to target the messenger itself, especially when that message is deemed anti-government, and question its loyalty.

Several fronts

This approach is being pursued on several fronts simultaneously - see for example the attempt to diffuse the Scorpene submarine issue by focusing instead on non-governmental organisation Suara Rakyat Malaysia or Suaram and demanding that it "come clean" and disclose from where it obtains its funding.

The allegation being advanced here is that it is being funded by foreigners and is therefore being used as a tool to undermine the safety and security of the nation.

Likewise Radio Free Sarawak, a tool of that wicked and pernicious Clare Rewcastle Brown, which is in "cahoots" with the Bruno Manser Foundation.

Together, it is alleged, they spread lies about the Chief Minister of Sarawak and his government, to the detriment of its people.

The attacks on the institutional reputation of the Bar Council and attempts to impugn its credibility and question its impartiality and integrity can also be seen as part of a plan to question the loyalty of those seen as critical of the government.

And if anyone needs reminding, the loyalty of Ambiga Sreenevasan in relation to the Bersih 3.0 has clearly been called into question far too often.

The latest is of course the suggestion that her actions are treasonous and deserving of the death penalty.

Even though an apology of sorts has been tendered (but not to Ambiga herself) and the remark withdrawn, the fact remains that it has been uttered and is a matter of public record.

Its mischievous intent has already been achieved.

If nationality and patriotism doesn't work, there is always religion.

On several occasions already we have had allegations made in public of an attempt to Christianise Malaysia and turn it into a Christian state.

This was followed by the attempt made to compromise the report of the fact-finding mission led by Australian Senator Nicholas Xenophon (right).

He was wrongly accused of being anti-Islam based on an extract of a speech that he gave in the Australian Senate that had been tampered with.

The report was further challenged for its credibility by the fact that he and his team were invited by the Leader of the Opposition, and by the fact that he "participated" in the Bersih 3.0 sit-in demonstration on April 28, 2012.

It shows that these fears are truly 'Xenophobic'.

Thirdly, it shows that the powers-that-be are prepared to do whatever it takes to desperately cling on to power, however irresponsible it may be.

As we are often told, there is nothing more dangerous than a wounded animal.

In its wounded state, they have been prepared to resurrect the ghost of communism, and also to declare Bersih 3.0 as an attempted coup d'état.

Revising history

Notwithstanding that both members of government and the police force spoke to and/or corresponded with members of the Bersih 2.0 Steering Committee in the run-up to the Bersih 3.0, historical revisionists and the compliant print media are already rewriting history by referring to the Bersih 3.0 as an illegal assembly, when in fact no such declaration was ever made.

In this regard the letter written by Counsellor (Political) at the Malaysian High Commission in Singapore, Nik Ady Arman, to The Straits Times in Singapore is incorrect and is a clear attempt to misinform Singaporeans.

His attempt to draw supposed distinctions between monitoring by representatives of foreign missions of legal as opposed to illegal assemblies was an exercise in pure obfuscation.

If foreign mission representatives should only monitor demonstrations and assemblies that are permitted or endorsed by the authorities, they might as well enjoy a stroll in the park instead.

Indeed the very issue of how the government and Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur could have invited the Bersih 2.0 steering committee to use an alternative venue such as Stadium Merdeka when it was purportedly declared an illegal organisation by the Minister of Home Affairs on July 1, 2011, has never been fully explained.

This same question exercised the judge who was hearing the judicial review application by the Bersih 2.0 steering committee challenging that declaration by the home affairs minister.

She certainly did not receive a satisfactory answer from government lawyers at the High Court hearing on June 26, 2012.

Her decision will be eagerly awaited when it is scheduled to be handed down on July 24, 2012.

We should therefore closely scrutinise and be highly critical of attempts to highlight the so-called involvement of external parties in the current environment.

We cannot discount the possibility that as we head towards the 13th general election, and concerns escalate as to the survivability of certain political parties, they or their proxies will increasingly resort to attempts to accuse foreign elements of scheming to destabilise our country as a means of shoring up their electoral support.

This could be nothing more than like a 'wild wild west' movie where there is a need to 'circle the wagons' in the face of an external threat.

Except that in this case the external threat is make-believe.

A wayang by any other name is still as fictitious.

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