

Implausible nonsense - Malaysia's political theatre

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COMMENT There are two types of nonsense - plausible and implausible. Plausible nonsense is when someone spins a story to children, which although implausible to adults is plausible to young minds. Though not believable to adults, most children stories have the redeeming value of being educational and entertaining.

Then there is implausible nonsense which does not make any sense at all. Clowns and buffoons engage in implausible nonsense for the purpose of entertaining audiences and bringing comic relief.

In Shakespeare's plays, his clowns and fools did not only invite laughter but they often had something profound to say. The Shakespeare fool, who is usually a person of low or common birth, provided insights into the main characters belonging to the nobility as well as shedding light on the central themes of the play.

In Malaysia we have political clowns dominating the national stage but unlike in Shakespeare's plays, they provide no entertainment or anything of merit or significance to our conflict-ridden society. Instead, they simply push up our stress levels.

The three most recent examples of political clowns are our deputy prime minister, Muhyiddin Yassin; the Malacca chief minister, Idris Haron; and the parliamentarian, Bung Moktar Radin.

Why the 'child conversion' ambush now?

When given the opportunity to say something sensible about the controversial Administration of Religion of Islam (Federal Territories) Bill tabled in parliament recently, the DPM defended the government action by claiming that "the cabinet has discussed this in detail and... in the current situation, there have been several guidelines that we used. One of them is the court's decision on a previous case and the second is the Malaysian constitution. So that is the jurisdiction of power we have today."

Unlike his colleague Nazri Aziz who has been consistently principled on the issue, Muhyiddin has conveniently forgotten that the new cabinet decision is overturning an earlier decision of which he was a party to. He could have used the press conference occasion to demonstrate his Malaysian and not Malay leadership

qualities but chose instead to cloud the issue even more by providing spurious legal and constitutional arguments.

azlanWe have had more than enough public discussion and debate during the past few years on the issue of the conversion of children under the age of 18 as well as other cases of contested conversion to Islam.

Not only is there a broad consensus of opposition against forced conversion - whether of minors or adults - among our population of non-Muslim faith and religions but Islamic organisations such as Sisters in Islam and the Islamic Renaissance Front and many concerned Muslim individuals have spoken out with regard to the conversion of non-Muslim minors.

Now that the elections are over, perhaps Muhyiddin is trying to pander to the Umno delegates whose support he seeks in the party's coming general assembly meeting. If he is doing so, he is not helping the cause of Islam in Malaysia and its avowed message of fairness and tolerance.

What is really behind Jonker Walk closure?

Just as big a political clown - though at the state level - is the Malacca chief minister who has decided to show to the locals the stuff he is made of by making traffic congestion his first priority on assuming office.

NONEOne would have assumed that he would devote his time to more important state matters such as raising the state's productivity or attracting high value investment than traffic congestion in Jonker Walk. But no, a fight with the area's street traders who are mostly Chinese and presumably supporters of the opposition seems to be his strategy for grabbing national attention and notoriety.

As with Muhyiddin, Idris will have his eye on the coming Umno general assembly which will see the election of party supreme council members, a position which he is clearly aiming for. What better credentials to win the votes of delegates than a reputation as the man who single-handedly destroyed the rice bowl of opposition-inclined traders?

This would also embellish his international reputation further. Idris, during his first years in Parliament, made news headlines for complaining that the body-hugging outfits worn by stewardesses on Malaysia Airlines would result in male passengers sexually harassing the stewardesses. One wonders if this observation could have been provoked by his own response to the dress wear.

'Leave Malaysia' if you don't like it

The last in this group, Bung Moktar, the MP for Kitabatangan, had previously made the headlines with various political antics and a polygamous marriage which did not meet the procedures and conditions required by Islamic law.

This time around when debating the motion of thanks on the Royal NONEAddress, the Sabah Umno representative lowered his standard of buffoonery to engage in character assassination of AirAsia X chief executive Azran Osman Rani (left). Calling Azran a "Melayu biadab" (rude Malay) who did not deserve to be a citizen, he is reported to have yelled, "Leave this country and go live anywhere else you like."

His outburst led the speaker to point out to Bung Moktar that he should not use the privilege to speak in the Dewan Rakyat to criticise civilians and government officials who were unable to use the same platform to defend themselves.

The speaker should have also reminded the member of the House that such acts of political cowardice will live forever in the pages of Malaysian political history through our Hansard records.

There is however one solace. In Shakespeare's comedies, fools are called upon to encourage a more serious examination of the situations and characters of a play. Fools not only amuse and entertain, but they also help the audience to ponder on serious social, religious and political issues.

This is so true in the prolonged wayang kulit and the performing political clowns that invariably take centre stage before Umno's big day, the party election due this year in November.

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