

Dr M's claims on Chinese economic control 'outrageous'

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COMMENT As most people are aware, the intention of former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad in writing the piece, 'Chinese better off after Merdeka' for the New Straits Times is not to foster greater political consciousness amongst the Chinese; neither is it to improve inter-racial cooperation among Chinese and Malays.

It is also not meant to provide new ideas on how to transform the country and take it forward so that it can compete with nations such as Singapore, which is one of the op-piece's main targets.

Mahathir's aim is really to spread alarm and suspicion among the Malays and to stampede them into panic on the political transformation which is taking place among Chinese Malaysians and among all Malaysians.

Part of the recent political transformation among Malaysians is a questioning of what have been the real achievements of the Mahathir era, and what sort of legacy he has left the country. This is where Mahathir is evasive or silent, and for good reason.

Numerous studies have shown how despite our progress during the Mahathir years, the country's economy actually lost ground when compared with Singapore and other countries chiefly because he permitted – many critics claim, tacitly encouraged – a culture of high-level corruption and wastage on mega projects.

These, together with bad governance, have continued till today and have contributed little to national productivity. Hundreds, if not thousands, of billions of ringgit was invested in his pet projects which have benefitted the selected few and Umno.

Sure, some of the massive wealth derived from the hard-earned incomes of citizens and the oil and gas bonanza went to the middle class and professionals. But the greater proportion was siphoned off by the coterie of Chinese, Malay and other Malaysian businesspersons, politicians and other associates of the BN.

This has led to a situation where Malaysia's income inequality and illicit financial outflows ranks among the highest in the world, a development which Mahathir refuses to write or talk about, despite the fact that he is happy to provide his two

cents worth on practically every subject on Malaysia.

At the same time as Mahathir frittered away our national wealth and failed to lead the nation to compete with our neighbours in the region, he has presided over the lowering of educational standards, the abuse of executive power, and the racialisation of the civil service.

Most damaging of all, he has been responsible for breaking up our racial unity and social cohesion carefully built up since independence by the earlier prime ministers, by implanting and arousing new racial and political demons in our people.

One demon is that of the alleged Chinese control of the economy. As Mahathir knows, it is the government-linked companies (GLCs) and Malays that control the commanding heights of the economy.

There is no longer any Chinese control for the simple reason that much of Chinese capital and enterprise have been driven out of the country by the New Economic Policy (NEP).

DAP is main target for demonisation

The most lucrative sectors – oil and gas – is under Petronas which is controlled by the Malays. Similarly too, the banking, automobile, defence, agricultural and hi-tech sectors are all controlled by Malays and GLCs, leaving other Malaysians with scraps.

NONEAdd to this the new Malay billionaires such as Daim Zainuddin, Syed Mokhtar Al Bhukery, Eleena Azlan Shah, Azman Hashim, his own son, Mokhzani, Mahathir, and many others such as the Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud (left), whose wealth abroad, is not so easily quantifiable by Forbes, and it becomes clear that the spectre of Chinese economic dominance simply falls apart.

Mahathir may have to rely on the Chinese tradesman to fix his computer, car or air-conditioning but this is different from Chinese control of the economy.

The DAP has been one of Mahathir's main targets of demonisation. Now that the party is making inroads into the Malay electorate through its coalition with PAS and PKR, Mahathir feels that he has to make a pre-emptive strike to destroy both the DAP and Pakatan Rakyat and to ensure for Umno the continuity of Malay support.

Although I have supported the DAP in the last few elections, I am not a party member and disagree with some of its positions.

However, for Mahathir to claim that "DAP believes and strives to make a Singapore out of Malaysia where the Chinese wield political as well as economic power" is so outrageous and unbelievable that I am left with no doubt that his intention is sinister.

Such an allegation would be unacceptable even from the most rabid political extremist.

Nowhere in the ceramah and private discussions that I have had with Chinese leaders of the DAP has this view of Chinese economic and political dominance been expressed by any of them.

If anything, the DAP has often tried to be the junior partner in the Pakatan coalition, conceding to Malay leadership even when I sometimes think it does not matter which party leadership takes the lead in opposing Umno or BN.

Furthermore, his contention that "the dilemma for the Chinese is whether to make a grab for political power while dominating economic power or to adhere to the principle of sharing which has made this country what it is today" is so far from reality and the modest expectations that the Chinese have of their political position that it is laughable.

There is no such Chinese dilemma as explained by Mahathir just as there is no Malay dilemma in which Mahathir has written that the Malays are genetically inferior to the Chinese and will need his brand of racial privileging to redress.

'Respond to Dr M'

How should we respond? Many Malaysians have written to say to ignore the ramblings of an old political hack and I agree generally with this strategy. One reader in a major website has written to say: "Only stupid Malays will believe that a minority race will wrest the political power in a Malay-majority country. Even all the laws and constitutions are made to enforce that."

Those who doubt the opposition should attend their ceramah and hear what is their issue of concern for Malaysia, not based on a scared and cunning individual perception.

Unfortunately, such an approach will not undo the mischief and provocation that it is likely to create in the Malay world dominated by pro-Umno media and pro-Umno bloggers who see the world in pro or anti-Malay terms.

To counter the potential damage from what is probably the most irresponsible of Mahathir's recent commentaries, I would like to suggest the following - Umno, MCA and other leaders in the BN should publicly dissociate themselves from the article and blow the whistle on the former PM for attempting to stir up racial tensions.

MCA leaders who are the best judge of the DAP's politics should clarify whether they agree with Mahathir that their political opponents are engaged in a racial grab for power. This clarification should be addressed to the Chinese and Malay constituencies as soon as possible.

PKR and PAS leaders should also speak up and join in the condemnation of Mahathir's strategy of putting out lies and falsehoods to divide the nation. This is especially deplorable during the month of Ramadan.

Meanwhile, the Singapore authorities may want to issue a public response to Mahathir's opinion since he has deliberately brought in the bogeyman of the island-state to frighten the Malay electorate.

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