

May 13: Sacrifice of the innocents
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Teropong Negara

I refer to the malaysiakini report Exorcising the ghosts of May 13.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate Dr Kua Kia Soong for his efforts to dig out the truth surrounding this watershed of modern Malaysian history. My hope is that his work would be followed up by scholars like Prof Khoo Kay Kim.

Allegations that the May 13, 1969 incident was planned by Umno are not new. The first time the Malaysian public heard about this was when Marina Yusof as a staunch member of the then Semangat 46 made the allegation openly, attracting wide media coverage. Of course, it was categorically denied by Umno leadership then.

Others remembered seeing 'smoking guns' such as the Tanjong Karang Silat Sri Gayong Association suddenly undertaking intensive special exercises a few weeks before the incident.

One particular Umno member went back to his home town in Kedah from Kuala Lumpur to search of his 'serempang merah' and subsequently was heard reciting the 'ayat empat kerat', the mantra of warriors after every prayer. The Kampong Baru mosque in Kuala Lumpur suddenly attracted bigger crowds than ever before even during mid-day prayers.

On another perspective, the Tunku was busy courting his second wife-to-be who was presented to members of the public as his personal assistant. This against background rumours that he had suddenly become obsessed with mahjong.

The Tunku was already clearly overstaying his welcome. His love for drinking and too frequent 'ronggeng' sessions and love for horses were eroding away Umno's credibility among conservative Malays. On being interviewed by the Far Eastern Economic Review of what he thought of the proposal that adulterers be stoned to death, he replied that: 'I fear that there would not be enough stones left to construct our roads'.

Some speculated that in order to contain the endemic rot within Umno, it was decided by the party's inner circle that it was imperative to create a major incident as an excuse to clean, consolidate and restore Umno and thence the Malays to their rightful places. Hence, the sacrifice of the innocents on the streets of Kuala Lumpur at the first instance of provocation on the fateful day of May 13, 1969.

The fire of the incident was lit when a procession of lorries loaded with the members of the opposition parties celebrating their election victory passed by Kampong Baru boisterously demonstrating how they would 'sweep' Umno out of power with brooms. It all started somewhere near the official residence of the then menteri besar of Selangor which was then in Kampong Baru.

The rebellious position taken by Harun Idris from then onwards towards the main party leadership was also very telling as to who were the main sponsors of the drama. He was not sufficiently rewarded and was protesting emotionally for his unrewarded role in the incident. They had yet to find other ways to tame him and being a very charismatic leader of the time, it was no easy task.

I was then an undergraduate and had the opportunity to demonstrate together with others in the University of Malaya campus in clamouring for the Tunku to step down.

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