

**No laughing matter**  
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COMMENT To laugh or to cry? That is the question that I must answer every time I click through the online political, business or economic stories on Malaysia. Three of these caught my attention over the weekend.

One was about premier Najib Abdul Razak praising Dr Mahathir Mohamad no end over Proton's success. It's the kind of grubby grovelling that sickens you, as if Mahathir were a demigod.

The second was that Najib and Abdul Gani Patail, the so-called attorney-general (AG), will not attend the law conference to be organised by the Bar Council at the end of this month.

The third was on MCA vice-president Donald Lim's suggestion on creating a 'Chinese Perkasa' - what to him might have seemed like a moment of bravado but came to most learned Malaysians and critics abroad as yet another splendour of idiocy by the indefatigable hypocrite.

Everybody knows Najib is craven on the political front (as well as the social and economic fronts, and you'd be a mug to think the three are mutually exclusive). But Najib is more than craven when it comes to Mahathir, his mentor.

His endless praise for Mahathir is sickening. That Mahathir can be ascribed as the awe-inspiring, fearless and visionary leader who made Proton what it is today amounts to another of his many bare-faced lies, and flies in the face of a slew of historical facts.

Ask any serious car industry expert in Malaysia - not, of course, Rafidah Aziz and her immediate and extended family - and he or she will tell you that once you peel the Proton onion, its core is small, ugly and rotten. And when it emits the kind of stench that it has since the mid-1980s, it is, by any sensible person's calculus, an outright flop.

proton cars and money Those layers of the Proton onion are manifested by volumes of taxpayer funds that went into making the cars and rolling them out like sacks of manure. These are called state subsidies. In that sense I suppose it did become the people's car, even if the people were being fleeced left, right and centre by the Umno-BN regime to create a hopelessly cheap, nasty and uncompetitive product.

The only reason there have been so many Protons on Malaysian roads, like leprous scabs, is that their prices were artificially deflated whilst the regime, through its sheer weight of brilliance, hiked the taxes of all of Proton's main competitors.

That discounts the Mercedes and the BMWs, of course. Even a rich crony Malay would not, if he had any brains, touch a Proton with a 10-foot barge pole. Instead, he would jump straight into the latest German- or European-made engineering and design feat.

If Proton has been 'successful' in Malaysia, it certainly was a complete flop in international markets. I am reliably told that dealers had to entice potential Proton buyers - and there weren't too many either - with all kinds of freebies, including cash rebates, just for them to even sit in the driver's seat, let alone open the driver's door.

If the best of the Proton range were now to be tested on the BBC's motor-review show Top

Gear, it would be pooh-poohed all the way to Putrajaya, with bags of British manure loaded from end to end of the vehicle.

You might as well turn the Protons into bullock carts and use them in the padi fields because, quite simply, they would be useless on the racetrack. And just how many Protons have you seen being raced since 1985?

None.

Dangerous tack

With that kind of spin and hubris, it is understandable why Najib and the AG do not have the guts to attend the Bar Council's law conference. Abdul Gani must be working overtime to come up with an excuse but Najib has a pre-fabricated one. How nice.

Malaysian politics and its legal system are in a parlous state. Umno-BN politicians, and none greater than Mahathir himself, have routinely sodomised the legal system. Even the purveyors of justice - the Malaysian judiciary, most of whom are political appointees - are effortlessly incompetent.

So you would think that this would be the one summit, before the general election, for Najib and his AG to attend and even answer some fundamental questions from the floor.

Whether Anwar Ibrahim's attendance at the summit is a key factor for Najib and Abdul Gani's no-show is not anyone's guess but an interesting one. Scared, perhaps? After all, Anwar probably would run rings around any of the arguments or points that Najib or the AG could ever dream up.

Which leads one from that show of gutlessness by Najib and the AG to the apparent bravado of BN component party goon Donald Lim. One reader has likened Lim to Old McDonald for his incessant quacking. And what a quacky gem he came up with. It goes to show the level of stupidity - the shameful bodoh-ism - that pervades the so-called government. Is Malaysia becoming dumb and dumber?

Here's Lim exhorting the Chinese to form their own Perkasa to counter the body filled with Malay nationalist rightwing nuts who would suit up well in Nazi uniforms. Lim says it's a pressure group, a NGO that will be run independently of the MCA (and, presumably, the sickening toads in Gerakan).

"The MCA can only respond (to the Malay Perkasa's racial taunts) up to a certain level - it should be the NGOs versus their counterparts," he reportedly said.

Lim's call should alarm fair-minded Malaysians. His move is about as daft as that by Umno and its Youth wing in wielding the keris in the name of Malay supremacy. Raising the racial stakes isn't good politics. It isn't even clever politics. This is a dangerous tack to take in the face of the highly malevolent and combustible nature of racist politics in Malaysia.

Not a clever move

During my first visit to Malaysia, in 1985, it became very clear to me that racism is marrow of its political system. It had also become the soul of society at every level, no thanks to the race riots in 1969 and the onslaught of the racist New Economic Policy. And it was also clear that these characteristics would not change any time soon.

Today, the situation is far worse, and far more politically perilous. What has worsened the fracture of politics and society is that the political grotts in Umno and BN have had their snouts so deep in racism and racial politics, and corruption and greed, that this has become their own self-preservation and of their cronies and nepotists.

It would be stupid to think Lim does not understand this. He is, after all, a card-carrying member of the racist Umno-BN regime. That his call for a Chinese Perkasa was made out of his own reading of the worsening racism and racialist politics in Malaysia may be true. That his call was made without consent from the feudalists of the MCA and, more importantly, without approval from Najib and Umno, would be folly.

The Chinese may well have a large footprint on the domestic economy, but the MCA cannot and will not deny Umno's stranglehold on politics, even if Pakatan Rakyat runs a few states, and only just.

That Lim isn't a particularly intelligent - no, clever - MCA leader who virtually bought his senatorship and a gig in Najib's pitiful cabinet, albeit in a lowly, subservient role, shouldn't surprise. In fact he's a dead giveaway. A no-brainer. Just read what he had to say in media reports on July 10, and be the judge.

He said the Najib regime would be able to handle Perkasa's demands and that the Chinese community needn't worry about Perkasa since it would be able to form a similar organisation. If there's nothing to worry about, and Umno can manage or temper Perkasa's ultra-rightist demands, why is he urging the Chinese community to form its own group in the first place?

He said the MCA could only play a limited role in a Chinese Perkasa. But Umno plays a full(er), if surreptitious, role in Perkasa. And if Najib can manage Perkasa's racist demands, would Lim then, ipso facto, not have to deal with Perkasa's ultra right-wing racist thugs like Ibrahim Ali and the movement's adopted Fuhrer, Mahathir? Is Lim suggesting that the Malay Perkasa can be distinguished from Umno without fault?

Nothing makes sense. What does make sense is that he is playing up a nasty bit of populist politics, spin and hubris. Lim's quackiness targets the Chinese community, with both eyes on winning Chinese political sentiment through Chinese chauvinism.

Nothing new here. There are no liberal progressives in Umno, MCA or Gerakan. Nor anywhere else within BN. All Lim is doing is what all Malaysian politicians do as a matter of course - play racial politics. Because that is how Malaysian society has long been stratified: first by race, then by class.

MCA is Chinese. It is a party of the rich Chinese, for rich Chinese, including the regime's Chinese cronies who are the MCA's patrons.

But the MCA's popular support on the ground among the Chinese community has been sliding badly over the last few years. It is around 25 percent nationally, and still falling. Lim wants to capture 50 percent of the Chinese popular vote. It was almost wiped out in the 2008 poll. That's how quickly irrelevant the MCA has become. It hasn't much credibility left.

Which is perhaps good news for the DAP and PKR, at least for now. Lim will be lucky to hold his seat. His Chinese Perkasa idea shows his desperation to find some political traction after the MCA's self-inflicted bruising politics. To save whatever face is left, Lim may ask the MCA

to force former party boss Ong Tee Keat to vacate his Pandan seat - the only one the party won in Selangor two years ago.

If DAP and PKR can get their act together and play it intelligently, with credibility and professionalism, MCA could be annihilated at the next poll. Deservedly. Gerakan will probably face the same fate. Deservedly, too.

And if the pitifully incompetent and corrupt MIC gets smashed as well - and it should - this will severely weaken Umno which will, if the poll indicators do suggest a shellacking to come, begin to backpedal on its nasty racist bile that makes its policies and politics.

Then again, stranger things have happened. But don't expect politics redux. It has never happened before. What makes you think it could happen in the future?

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