

M'sia at 53: Dysfunctional and in need of reform
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The dangers of playing race politics seem to have escaped leaders from the ruling Umno. They keep churning out garbage engineered to make opposition leaders look like insensitive racists.

First, Umno generals accused Penang Chief Minister and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng (right) of "ordering" that his name be replaced by the King's in Fridays sermons in the state.

Next, the lawmaker from Serdang, Teo Nie ching, was branded as "dirty" for what Umno leaders call as her improper presence and actions in a surau.

Now Lim's doctored photo slaughtering a cow for the consumption of Muslims is making the rounds.

If this is not enough young rapper Namewee was questioned by the police following calls by Umno leaders and government ministers for action to be taken against him for what they alleged were seditious remarks in a video called 'Nah'.

Clearly, the Umno leaders are morally bankrupt and will stop at nothing to make a point. Even if it means stirring racial sentiments that could potentially be dangerous in multiracial Malaysia.

The Malaysian government, in its efforts to project a united nation to the outside world, has always spun a yarn about cosy race relations in the country. Reality speaks a different language.

The country saw its worst sectarian violence on May 13, 1969.

We saw a repeat of racial violence in Taman Medan in 2001, which left six people dead and at least 40 severely injured.

No qualms fanning racial sentiments

Despite these incidents, we still have some leaders who have no qualms about fanning racial sentiments. And we have seen the snowball effect of this over the last few months.

We have school principals hurling racial slurs at their students. Barely a week after a school principal in Johor uttered derogatory remarks, her counterpart in Kedah accused Chinese students of being disrespectful for eating during Ramadan.

All they did was have breakfast at the canteen, a dedicated space.

At the school assembly later, the principal told them to go back to China. And after the assembly, another teacher told the students to take AirAsia, since the fares are cheap.

Wee's video, which has since been taken down from his blog, showcased a three-minute rap song in which he raged, in expressive language, against incidents of racism in Malaysia.

He targeted, in particular, the officials of the two schools in Kedah and Johor.

Early this year, in January, churches were torched and a mosque and Sikh temple were vandalised. Recently, a surau near Seremban had red paint splashed on its walls.

Although these are shameful acts of cowardice, they signal that the seremban church door burned 110110 02problem is deep-rooted and needs careful handling as it could totally handicap the social fabric of our society.

The intolerance demonstrated by Malaysians towards one another can only mean deep-seated anger, suspicion and frustration, primarily mooted by years of institutionalised discrimination in the country.

Clearly, race-relations in the country are fragile and worsening.

We now have Prime Minister Najib Razak parading his 1Malaysia slogan, aiming at national integration through racial unity. But the premier's approach is heading towards a naught as it deals with pressing problems on a superficial level.

Imagine this - a beaming Najib speaking to a multiracial crowd, promising he is the prime minister for all. Then visualise Ibrahim Ali, the head of Perkasa, spitting venom and challenging all those who disagree with the "social contract" to leave the country, in a refrain brought up weeks back by Mingguan Malaysia columnist Mohd Ridhuan Tee.

And even as I write this, Ibrahim is parroting his favourite, line asking fellow Malaysians to "go back to the place of their forefathers". In a fervent self-promotion banter, Ibrahim always has and will continue to disparage the Chinese and Indians in the country.

Lack of political spine

Najib and his ruling party Umno have, however, shown a lack of political spine by not reprimanding him or Ridhuan Tee.

But what is even more appalling is to note that former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Ibrahim are speaking the same language.

Mahathir said that if the NEP is removed, then poor bumiputera would go after rich non-bumiputera. Where did he get the idea that all non-bumiputera are rich? Clearly there are bumiputera and non-bumiputera who are poor as well.

Therefore the solution cannot be race-based but class- and rights-based.

Recently the World Bank study for the Human Resources Ministry showed that about 30 percent of Malaysian workers (400,000 workers) are earning less than the poverty cut-off point of RM720.

Why was there no noise from the likes of Ibrahim and Dr Mahathir as the majority of the workers are Malays?

We could, therefore, conclude that the racial hatred spewed by both these guys is specific to supporting the Malay bourgeoisie, especially the Umno cronies, and not all Malays.

This trend of raining racial slurs against fellow Malaysians has happened once too often in the last few months.

But the thorny issues linked to race and religion are not going to simply fade away. Concerted effort is crucial to find a durable solution to the continuing racial strife in the country.

NONEDirect threats like those by Ibrahim (right) demanding that MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek be put away under the Internal Security Act, which allows for indefinite detention without trial for questioning the 30 percent bumiputera equity, is not going to help.

This is not a movie script where it's acceptable to silence dissenting voices. In present day Malaysia, where the lines of colour are merging, its definitely archaic to issue threats to stop open debates on sensitive issues.

The recent happenings in the country and the government's inability to nip it in the bud translate to mean disaster. It shows that Malaysia's political system is becoming more dysfunctional and dragging its economy into the doldrums.

And it certainly is going to keep away local and foreign investors. Let's look at some facts and figures.

Foreign direct investments (FDIs) in 2009 plunged 81 percent from 2008. In fact, the FDI outflow in 2009 was 5.81 times the inflow.

Unable to compete for FDIs

Malaysia is not able to compete with crisis-riddled Thailand and Indonesia in attracting FDIs. At best, it attracted only 23 percent of Thailand's and 28.32 percent of Indonesia's.

More significantly, when there is a healthy trend of FDIs flowing into Southeast Asia (RM118.02 billion inflow versus RM68.25 billion outflow), Malaysia appears like a sore thumb.

A net inflow indicates investors' confidence in our system. Conversely, an outflow spells trouble to the nation.

Malaysia's racial policies, rampant corruption, stagnant income, muted media, curbing on democratic rights, tainted judiciary, brain drain, extra judicial killings and an unaccountable government have contributed to investors shying away.

Therefore, political instability brought about by escalating racial tensions will contribute even more extensively to a fast-sliding economy.

The Umno-led Barisan Nasional government must wake up from its deep slumber and acknowledge that we have a dangerously erratic situation in our hands.

The nation is at a crossroad and if the present scenario is amplified, the Malaysian economy will fall out of the investors' radar and the number of Malaysians leaving the country will increase from the current 700,000.

We can then officially call Malaysia a failed state.

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