

Racialist system to stay
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Manjit Bhatia

I'm always intrigued when some Malaysians like Umar Mukhtar (You can't defeat BN with communal politics) read into one's writing more than it warrants, and then go way over the top with their responses.

I recall Rafidah Aziz, Malaysia's recalcitrant trade minister, do likewise when at a World Trade Organisation press conference in Singapore in 1996, she accused me of "putting words in her mouth" after I asked her this: "Will President Clinton's fast-track authority over issues such as intellectual property and labour rights, and your inherent reluctance to negotiate these, worry your government's ability to maintain your economy's low-end competitive advantage?"

As usual, Rafidah went off her rocker. She didn't answer my question. Naturally. And, quite typically, she chose to play the man, not the ball - just as her mentor Dr Mahathir Mohamad had taught her.

It's intriguing - or perhaps no longer - when some Malaysians like Mukhtar automatically posit that foreigners like me shouldn't be allowed to comment on or interfere with Malaysia's internal politics.

More, Mukhtar cries foul that Australia is [now?] my safe 'haven' from Malaysia's ugly, racist, scandalously corrupt and incompetent system of government.

'Haven' is the wrong word. Heaven, mate. And, yes: I am a damn proud Ozzie. Even so, I've never shied from publicly criticising the Australian government. This is the real meaning of democracy. And I'm not going to stop commenting on the Malaysian politics, economy and society.

Mukhtar position against my Australian nationality merely showcases the lunacy of some educated Malaysian minds that are submerged in a ridiculously narrow-minded, immature, Malay nationalistic jingoism. In decrying my Australian identity, Mukhtar appears akin to suffering from penis envy.

Yet nobody is stopping Mukhtar, not even his Malay-dominated government, from leaving Malaysia permanently if he is in fact jaded by its ugly politics. So I don't understand his petulant whining.

I don't think neither LCH's arguments nor mine are necessarily elitist or defeatist. I would love nothing more than to see the overthrow of the inherently corrupt and incompetent Umno-led regime and its major and minor coalition parasites, and force an overhaul of the manically pro-state mainstream media.

If only Mukhtar was less so judgmental. Had he bothered to read all my previous writings and postings over many years, he would have realised that we generally agree that such a move against the ruling regime must come from below - not just by voters, as Mukhtar argues, but also by the amalgamation of all Malaysians, irrespective of their race, into a single political voice backed by action.

Sadly, this hasn't happened in the last 50 years; it may not in the next 50. Of course, I would like my pessimism to be proven wrong. But I don't think it will. Why?

Again, like Mukhtar, it is because of the embedded nature of communal politics and, what is more, the socialisation of Malaysian identity and social interaction along strongly racial lines. Does Mukhtar deny a general apathy exists among Malaysian voters to actively want change?

By and large, the so-called harmony that Malaysia's race-based politicians boast time and again are illusory. Racial harmony between Malaysians is probably only superficial. It is strongest at the elite level, because of its historical, shared class interests.

With the ubiquitous backing of the Malay-dominated state, which is protected by the security forces – the predominantly Malay police and armed forces – this class has, since the inception of the New Economic Policy, and in particular since the reign of the Mahathir regime, plundered Malaysia's wealth and resources ad infinitum.

It has been able to do so because the state shamelessly uses crude racial differences and overt symbols to proscribe any possibility of a class alignment from below that may fuse with race.

As for the opposition parties such as the DAP, PAS and PKR: who cares? In case Mukhtar misses the point, I agree with his view of Malaysia's opposition parties.

Does anybody seriously think they present a credible alternative to Barisan Nasional embedded squalid racism and kleptomaniac tendency? No. Have they run on the board with credible, intelligent, far-sighted, democratic policy alternatives? No. Will the huge electoral gerrymandering (germicide), routine election rigging and associated cowardly political bastardry by Umno and its coalition leeches allow any opposition party to form government? No.

Will Umno not fan overt and covert political threats and perpetuate bloody violence against any such challenges - as stupidly symbolised by Hishammuddin Onn's keris-brandishing bravado at the last Umno general assembly?

It's called 'parang' mentality. Or, 'hantam' - with blood if necessary. It's all very Zimbabwean.

The Indian Malaysians of Kampung Medan saw it first-hand in 2001. Many non-Malay Malaysians saw it first-hand on May 13, 1969. In the intervening period, NEP politics solidly embedded communal politics and powerfully institutionalised the repressive state's racism.

Funnily, though, I have not once heard the general Malay populace publicly complain about their Malay-dominated government's racist policies and system of political oppression. Why criticise the crutches mentality? Later in his reign, Mahathir criticised the crutches policy. But that was purely for populist reasons and for sound bites. Everybody knew, the Malays especially, that nothing was going to change. Malaysia's apartheid system will stay.

Now the NEP, which was to have officially ended in 1990, has been extended indefinitely. Meaning the politics of old will stay. And even if Malays were to achieve 30 percent equity in the broader Malaysian economy (who trusts the government's numbers racket?), who's to say the NEP will not continue indefinitely?

Meanwhile, from the interstices of racist Malaysian politics, new parasitic cronies of BN politicians have been emerging. They, too, now demand their share of the national wealth by whatever means, often crooked. Who's going to stop them?

Like Mukhtar, I have no doubt there are many Malaysian voters who - privately - want genuine change. But by votes alone?

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