

PM's rhetoric signals start of the silly season
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COMMENT With a general election around the corner, overblown rhetoric is par for the course. But rhetoric that portrays the opposition as unpatriotic is one tactic that ought to be retired in this prelude to the 13th general election.

Would that be asking too much?

Apparently so, if the opening salvoes coming out of the one-day BN convention yesterday are anything to go by.

And it's not just advertence to Dr Samuel Johnson's famous dictum: "Patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels", that ought to retire this obsolete bit of campaign weaponry; it's the people that are using this hoary, old tactic that ought to take a look at their bona fides before calling others disloyal.

It's all right for Umno-BN flunkys to describe Pakatan Rakyat stalwarts as disloyal for criticisms of the government spoken in forums abroad; it's another thing altogether for Umno-BN luminaries to denounce these critics as "anti-national."

It's understandable, perhaps, when some Umno-BN journeyman attempts to stick the "unpatriotic" tag on the opposition.

But it's quite a leap for the BN chief, Najib Razak, himself suspected of benefitting from huge commissions stemming from arms purchases and rumoured to be implicated in a murder cover-up, to be levying the same charge.

The real 'traitors'

All's fair and foul in love and war, it is said. A general election, one with the stakes as high as the 13th's appears to be, is electoral warfare, no doubt.

But this use of the patriotic trope to paint the opposition as quislings is dangerous for precautionary reasons: too much use of it may encourage them, should they come to power, to establish a truth commission on the years of BN misrule.

The findings may well ferret out the 'real traitors' – those who have given away national assets to other nations, or who used foreign companies to defraud local ones that ran national assets.

Those misdeeds are tantamount to treason. And we know what the punishment for that is.

Dr Johnson was not comprehensive enough in his intuition about the last redoubts of the shameless: Patriotism may be the last refuge of the treasonous.

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