

Malaysia's Jurassic Park
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Needless to say, Malaysia is endowed with natural resources.
MCPX

Compliment is good. But too much of it causes fatigue too. At many international meets, I often get the comments that Malaysia is so blessed with rubber, oil palm, petro, gas etc. So much so that I sometimes wonder if these foreigners are actually asking: "Tell me, why is the country still lagging behind in terms of human resources and technological innovation, while being beset with chronic corruption in almost all sectors?"

And it now seems that Malaysia has some newly found "natural" resources: political dinosaurs.

keng yaik dap perak 140308 veteranJust look at Dr Lim Keng Yaik, a man who should have exited gracefully from the political arena and enjoy retirement to his heart's content. Instead, the Gerakan veteran is very much in action, and continues to make remarks that undermine Dr Koh Tsu Koon's acting leadership.

Before March 8, Lim ran a lousy and tasteless campaign that saw his son defeated by more than 9,000 votes. Always a sore loser, he then vowed to quit politics altogether – taking his son with him – if the rakyat in the Kinta Valley would accept a PAS menteri besar.

Well, I am waiting for him to make good of his pledge but he is behaving in a manner unbecoming of his status.

But who cares? Is Lim so innocent to believe that his words still carry weight? With merely two seats in Parliament, and Koh failing to exert his authority, who really thinks Gerakan is still relevant?

Too serious to be ignored

Lim must learn from Dr Lim Chong Eu, who has very much remained behind the scenes since 1990, providing sensible and statesmanlike advice only when absolutely necessary, such as his concerns that Gerakan had lost its multiracial roots when the merger talks between the Penang-based (still?) and the MCA were taking place in late 2003.

samy vellu pc 120308 prejudiceSamy Vellu of the MIC is another highlight in Malaysia's Jurassic Park. Ok, he is still the party president. But by refusing to acknowledge his defeat in Sungai Siput to Dr Michael Jayakumar, but blamed it on "thugs carrying rocks and knives", the semi-value ex-minister only makes himself look like a fool.

With our super efficient, world-class FRU and police action assured, who on earth thinks these "thugs" could go unpunished? I urge Dr Jayakumar to challenge Samy to substantiate his claims for this kind of allegation is too serious to be ignored, and tarnishes our country's image too.

But the political dinosaur that attracts the biggest crowd is no doubt Dr Mahathir Mohamad, although it does not mean the former prime minister is any more intelligent than other

co-exhibits in our Jurassic Park.

As my dear friend, Rustam, wrote before he departed this mundane world (may he rest in peace), it is sometimes quite mind-boggling that Mahathir's words, no matter how shallow, crass or bitter, still excite the people.

I will go a step further by asking: is Malaysia so badly in need of comedians, or are Malaysians so bored, that we have to listen to a political has-been just to spice up our life?

mahathir hulu langat 120408 press conference Perhaps it only reveals the saddest truth that years of intellectual enslavement have resulted in an unthinking society, with a populace constantly looking for guidance and inspirations from political leaders.

Everyone who is familiar with Mahathir should know this man is utterly unprincipled and full of vengeance. He now talks like the last liberal holding the democratic fortress in Malaysia and I am really surprised several high profile bloggers even see him as a comrade!

But who is responsible for the demise of the system of checks and balances over the years?

Pak Lah's failures

I was flabbergasted when Bakri Musa, my fellow columnist, apportions Mahathir with only 10% of the blame for the nation's present ills. Bakri even argues, rather childishly, that "blaming Mahathir alone would also not pass the philosophical test on the meaning of causation... we might as well blame Abdullah's mother if we were to pursue this line of logic, for had she not given birth to him, we would have been spared this debacle".

Really, I cannot believe Bakri actually wrote this.

No one is putting the blame solely on Mahathir. I agree with the observations of a number of political analysts that Abdullah's failure to deliver was a core factor in the BN's recent Pyrrhic victory. However, one must understand Mahathir's damage is so profound that it will take much more than a mediocre to rectify the cracked system.

Some say the 1988 judicial crisis led to the erosion of the "quality" of future generation of political leaders, meaning Abdullah & Co., but why should Mahathir's culpability be exonerated?

Without learning from history, one is bound to repeat it. Most importantly, deconstructing the Mahathir myth and coming to terms with his damaging legacy will do well to educate the rakyat that pinning our hope on the mortal and corruptible man will only court future catastrophes, not blessings. Recent history is full of such lessons: Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, the Meiji Emperor, Mao Zedong, you name it.

abdullah ahmad badawi pak lah civil servants forum 280108 talking Alright, these are extreme examples and Mahathir, of course, is not all that bad. At least I was allowed some space to criticize his iron rule, albeit on the Internet, when he was still calling the shots from Sri Perdana, orchestrating all the sandiwara.

Compared to Ferdinand Marcos, Robert Mugabe and the Burmese junta, Mahathir appears almost like a "benevolent tyrant", yet his achievements pale into insignificance when juxtaposed those of great leaders like Konrad Adenauer of Germany and Kim Dae Jung of Korea, both of whom guided their countries through difficult times without enriching their

family members and building a cult of personality around themselves. Certainly not at the expense of the judiciary and civil liberties.

Bakri also argues that Mahathir "has been trying his best to rectify it". Wow! This is news to me!

What has Mahathir been rectifying so far? Has he admitted his role in the rot in the judiciary? Has he shouldered the responsibility over the democratic deficits in Umno? Has he confessed that he, too, groomed cronies like Vincent Tan, Ananda Krishnan and Lee Kim Yew when in power, and surrounded himself with minions masqueraded as journalists when he was in charge?

Bakri laments the lack of intellectual vibrancy on our campuses, and chastises Shamsul A B and Johan Jaafar for their subservience to the authorities. Yet the fact that these people are the very products of Mahathir's effort to stifle academic dissent escapes him!

And it is Mahathir's intolerance of academic critics that made our campuses extremely hostile to intellectual giants like Rustam and Dr. Syed Husin Ali.

Didn't Malaysia lose another academic stalwart in Dr Azly Rahman because of the Aku Janji pledge, a Mahathir's legacy?

So, still 10% of the blame should go to the vengeful old man?

Our country has all the potentials to perform better, and the only thing that is holding us back is the misperception, or instrumentalist notion that independence of the judiciary, police professionalism and human rights are expendable for the sake of economic development. At least this seems to be what Bakri believes given his appreciation of Mahathir's "talents".

Raise the benchmark, Bakri and my fellow Malaysians. It is time that we close down the Jurassic Park once and for all.

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