

**Perkasa - rebirth of a demon**  
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**AB Sulaiman**

The birth of Malay NGO Perkasa is obviously causing a stir in the Malaysian social, intellectual and political landscape.

It has declared intention of acting as a "shield against those who question Malay rights, the royalty and Islam", according to its founding head and Independent MP Ibrahim Ali.

The target and philosophy is thereby made clear - to protect and promote the sanctity of Islam, the *martabat* (dignity and honour) of the Malay people, and the spirit of nationalism. This falls under the ideology and banner of *untuk agama, bangsa dan negara* (for religion, race and nation).

But hasn't the same philosophy and ideology been used by the Malay leadership in governing the country ever since Independence in 1957? Wasn't it adopted in the interests of *ketuanan Melayu* (KM) after the launch of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970?

To be sure it is the same. Yet, over the last 52 years, it has not seen much success.

So what's the idea of creating Perkasa now and making the defence and propagation of religion and race sound like a newfound revelation that must be pursued with such immediacy and enthusiasm? Against what threat is the shield designed to protect? From where does this come from anyway? It is indeed a puzzle.

The truth of the matter is that people today are tired of KM leadership. It is so blatantly racist and theological that even Malays are embarrassed by it. Today's citizens think, listen, read, travel and demand more - they are better informed and knowledgeable, and reject racism and religious extremism.

They are also more aware of the situation around them. They are aware of the abuse of power, abuse of the NEP, corruption and the breakdown of institutions of governance. Civil society movements are agitating and demanding liberty and respect for universal human rights.

All this does not bode well for KM leadership, considering the realisation that KM has not really fought for Malay dignity and honour. It has been fighting more to fill the pockets of a few and to protect a small number of politically-connected individuals.

The disenchantment was amply demonstrated by the results of the 2008 election, leading to BN and Umno - the latter being the most active front for KM - losing the two-thirds majority in Parliament, and the Opposition gaining control of five states.

The influence of Umno is waning. Malays are running away from Umno, as are Chinese from MCA and Indians from MIC.

In other words, BN is in tatters. This is why Perkasa was hastily created - to stem this erosion of support.

### **Inherent illusions**

This quick analysis and conclusion may or may not be right but, to me, it is entirely

consistent with the facts and situations surrounding the formation of Perkasa.

I question why it is re-using the religion, race and nationalism card when this has been proven to be obsolete and irrelevant in bringing progress and change to Malay social and economic development. My scepticism is based on the following observations on KM-based thinking and its inherent prejudices and illusions:

- It claims to hold the monopoly on truth. Such thinking holds the view that Islam is the only religion approved by god and that other religions are false. This perception of exclusivity is, of course absurd, for religion is a matter of faith between an individual and his or her god.
- It carries the illusion that the Malay culture is the world's foremost culture, with its pristine *budi bahasa* and *sopan santun* coupled with a high sense of morality. Again this is an absurd, unilateral claim, for any culture has its etiquette and morality, no better nor worse than any other. It can be seen therefore that the KM norm is decked with hyperbolism - that being Malay and Muslim is the luckiest draw in the lottery of life.
- It can also be arrogant and has little or no tolerance for alternatives. Indeed its parameters have no avenue to realise its own mistakes. In short, it is black-and-white thinking: 'I am right therefore you are wrong. If you are not for me then you are against me.'
- It is a world of collective delusion of the superiority of the Malay culture and the uniqueness of Islam.

Well, the record of Malay governance has shown fairly conclusively that the religion- and race- based philosophy of governance has not worked. This is hardly surprising for any economics textbook will explain that the factors of economic production (or the creation of national wealth) are land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship. Of late, knowledge has been included. Further factors favouring the development of a civilisation are secularism, materialism and intellectualism.

Of these eight factors, none refer to race or religion. In concept and reality therefore, the KM formula for social and economic success is way off the mark. Indeed it has been a colossal mistake. The failure of the NEP is proof enough of this sobering contention.

I do not share the euphoria surround the formation of Perkasa. I do not see how its claim to protect race and religion can promote Malay socio-economic progress. Ibrahim's declared intentions show all the promise of repeating the mistake and are an exercise in futility.

Given that this philosophy is no longer viable, it is still a wonder why Ibrahim still resorts to it. Can there be any reason for this? I have a hypothesis explaining his loyalty to a failed philosophy and ideology.

There is a denial syndrome inherent in KM thinking, particularly since it lacks an avenue for self-realisation of mistakes. It will go on thinking that it has been right all along, and that other alternatives are figments of the imagination of anti-Malay elements.

KM brooks no dissent. Liberal and liberated Malays are quickly branded as ungrateful and 'mudah lupa' (forgetful). Non-Malays are also branded as ungrateful for not appreciating the hospitality of the Malays in giving them citizenship.

KM then states that non-Malays wish to deprive Malays of their rights, hence the birth of Perkasa.

## Hidden agenda

Perkasa has claimed an immediate membership of 5,000, with another 50,000 ahead. It has the direct support of former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad and incumbent deputy premier Muhyiddin Yassin. And barely a week ago, the Home Ministry issued a permit for its newsletter.

Based on all this, the suspicion is growing that Ibrahim may have a hidden agenda. As to what this is, only he can say for sure.

In any event, Perkasa's future terms of reference are to recapture and nurture yesterday's status quo:

- Develop a herd mentality among Malays.
- Delay or deny the sense of individual from developing in Malay psychology.
- Promote the prevailing dependence mentality among Malays.
- Nurture the sense of insecurity normally felt by the KM polity, namely political leaders, the *ulama*, civil servants and officials in government agencies such as the police, military, customs, immigration, and even the police and AG's chambers.
- Make all of them feel that the Malay ethnic group is still not ready to compete against the non-Malays and the rest of the world on a level plain.

With all this revitalised, Ibrahim can put his secret agenda into action.

All said and done, Perkasa's birth reflects the real or perceived sense of desperation and paranoia of conservative and orthodox Malay thinking. Or, it is the rebirth of the spirit of 'Malayness' that has apparently dwindled over the past few decades due to the process of change.

It is the rebirth of the religion and race-based KM demon that does not know its game is up. And sad to note, in the name of religion and race, the KM does not want to learn from its own mistakes.

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own mistakes.

*AB SULAIMAN is an observer of human traits and foibles, especially within the context of religion and culture. As a liberal, he marvels at the way orthodoxy fights to maintain its credibility in a devilishly fast-changing world. He hopes to provide some understanding to the issues at hand and wherever possible, suggest some solutions. He holds a Bachelor in Social Sciences (Leicester, UK) and a Diploma in Public Administration, Universiti Malaya.*

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