

The Mahathir prediction
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COMMENT Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has predicted that racial tension would escalate if the New Economic Policy (NEP) type of policies is removed in favour of open policies which disregard the disparities between races in the interest of equity and merit.

The former prime minister has also warned that the time is not right for changes to be made to the existing pro-Bumiputera affirmative policies.

He said that the violent Communist revolution in Europe was caused by the disparity between rich and poor, and hinted that such a scenario could happen in Malaysia if the so-called economic gap between the Bumiputeras and the other races is not narrowed.

Hence, he suggested that the affirmative policies and programmes be continued indefinitely, arguing that such a protection for the Bumiputera is still necessary and that a 20-year timeline is not enough for them to become economically on par with other races.

The NEP was launched in 1971 and technically ended in 1990, but most of its programmes are being continued.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has announced that he would remove subsidies and many of the pro-Bumiputera quotas under his meritocracy-based economic reforms, but many Malay leaders, including Mahathir, want to retain the status quo.

Mahathir has become the leading voice of dissidence against the New Economic Model (NEM) initiated by Najib, insisting that the affirmative scheme must continue, or else the Bumiputeras would lose out.

Mahathir's doomsday prediction that the country would plunge into a violent revolutionary situation like that of the 18th and 19th Century Europe if the affirmative economic policies and programmes are scaled is certainly alarmist and scaremongering, to say the least, and a witticism of the highest illusionary degree.

Mahathir talks as if all non-Bumiputras are rich and only Bumiputeras are in dire economic suffering. Granted that there are many Bumiputras in the rural who are really poor and deserving of government financial aid, but there are also many non-Bumiputras who are in similar appalling economic condition.

I am not saying that there should not be any affirmative policies and programmes to help those who are poor and underprivileged, but they should be based on needs, not on race. There are more poor Bumiputras simply because they constitute a larger portion of the population, and they deserve all the assistance to live a better life and lifestyle. So, do the poor of other races. The government affirmative policies and programmes should focus on the need of the poor of all races, not on any particular race irrespective of their economic status. MP Tony Pua's suggestion that those who can afford luxury houses costing more than half a million ringgit should not be given discount under the affirmative programme is not without merit. The discount money should rightly be channelled to help those who cannot afford a simple decent home.

If we are to take an honest look at the May 13 incident in 1969, which, incidentally, was the *raison d'etat* for the formulation and implementation of the NEP, we should realize that

basically race was just the whipping boy for what I believe to be the explosion of intensive frustration of the economic hardship suffered by the poor of all races – Malay, Chinese and Indians.

The May 13 riot was not racial per se. It was sparked off by the poor Malays being told by Malay politicians that the rich Chinese caused them the economic suffering, and the poor Chinese being told by Chinese politicians that the powerful Malays in the government caused them their hardship.

The riot was triggered off by the then massive suffering of many poor Malays and poor Chinese, both having reached the extreme intolerable level of economic and financial hardship. The intense manipulative racial stroking by irresponsible politicians of the already tense environment during the campaign for the May 10 general election detonated the already ticking economic time bomb, masquerading as packs of racial grenades all over the country..

The economic hardship was not confined to any particular race, and was fundamentally caused by an irresponsible corrupt government of the day. It was the demonic racist politicians who exploited the suffering poor and turn what was basically an economic deprivation problem into a racial bloodbath.

When I was doing a research paper on revolution for a course on history at the Flinders University in South Australia, I did a comparative study on the causes of revolutions in France (1789–1799), Russia (1917) and China (1911 and 1949). I found that there were five common factors that gave rise to the revolutions in these countries.

The first factor is that there was massive economic hardship among the general populace of the country. Many people were facing difficulties in even putting food on the table. Jobs were scarce. Children go to bed hungry. In such a situation, many became desperate, and couldn't care less about any consequence, even if they were to resort to violent means to survive. These people become fertile ground for the seed of revolution to take root and grow.

Secondly, while the majority of the population was suffering hardship, an elite class of economically powerful and corrupt officials and business people nonchalantly exploited the people. The people were heavily taxed, pieces of essentials keep rising, bribes were demanded for getting things done at government offices, the cops were trigger-happy, and many innocent people were persecuted and prosecuted on the most unsubstantial and flimsiest charges.

Such a scenario gave rise to a massive resentment and revulsion among the people. The circumstance was certainly appropriate for mass action to get rid of the immoral and corrupt political parasites.

Thirdly, the major influence and impact of the increasingly powerful mass media, particularly the newspapers, contributed to educate the general populace of their fundamental human and civil rights.

The people began to realize that they have absolute rights to a decent life and lifestyle, and that they are the actual bosses of those in the government and its administration. They began to demand for justice, fairness, economic equality, political freedom, liberty in organizing and operating their own well-being, and the rights to freedom of expression, worship, jobs and education.

In other words, the people have got up from their innocent slumber and became enlightened to the fact they have fundamental birth rights which they should protect, preserve and prevent from exploitation by the abusive and dictatorial authorities.

Fourthly, the rise of some well-educated idealistic charismatic leaders led to the mobilization and organization of the people into collective powerful pressure groups which took the lead to fight against the establishment. A massive people movement began to make the clarion call to the masses to stand up and be court for the nation. The charismatic people rousers became the powerful attractive socio-political magnets attracting the masses to march for change.

Finally, like Mao Zedong said, a mere spark will cause fire to a whole plain. In the case of 18th century France, Emperor Louis XIV and his successor Emperor Louis XVI mismanaged the nation's finances that by 1789, the government was bankrupt. Louis XVI resorted to impose heavy taxes on the people. The people, who suffered from bad harvest, exploded in anger and attacked the Bastille (prison for political prisoners). The Fall of Bastille started the French Revolution. It spread out to other parts of France.

The explosive pressure cooker blew its cover and all hell broke loose as the people took to the street to demand for accountability and change.

Nearer our time, we have seen how the dictator Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines was ousted by the People Power Revolution in 1986. The massive protest was brewing since 1983, after the assassination of opposition politician Ninoy Aquino, followed by the deteriorating economy, with the government plunging deeper into debt. By the end of 1983, the country was bankrupt, and the economy had contracted by 6.8%. The pressure started to build up until 1986 when the time bomb exploded.

From my studies on revolutions, we can observe that what gave rise to the massive visible, vocal and even violent demonstration demanding for reformation and transformation is basically the mass dissatisfaction, disenchantment and disillusion with the governing establishment, sparked off by just an unjust act.

There will not be any violent revolution in Malaysia, if there is a competent, accountable, and transparent government in Malaysia, which promotes and practices truth, righteousness, justice, equality, fairness, and caring concern.

Happy Medeka. May God bless our nation real good! — MySinChew.com

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