

**Guan Eng's Words Haunt Johor**  
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**By Mariam Mokhtar**

Just over 9 months ago, the Chief Minister of Penang, Lim Guan Eng became embroiled in a spat with Umno over his comments that Johore was an unsafe place. According to a Bernama report on 23 September 2011, Lim had allegedly said that "Johor was a state where kidnappings were common, unlike in Penang".

Today, Lim's words have come to haunt Malaysians after three members of a Singaporean family and their maid were kidnapped on Sunday 1 July. These kidnappings have been reported. What about the ones which go unreported? Are we seeing just the tip of the iceberg?

It would not be proper for the Chief Minister to gloat and say "I told you so" about Johor being an unsafe place; but we will do it for him. If the truth be told, Malaysians would probably agree that all over the country, the perception of Malaysia as a safe place is wrong.

In September last year, Lim was in Singapore when he allegedly made those remarks in a private meeting. Although he denies making them, and was unable to obtain a recording of the private session, he incurred the wrath of the Sultan of Johor and later apologised to him for the disparaging comments.

Sensing the opportunity to gain political mileage from this, the BN machinery went into top gear to discredit the Chief Minister.

The Deputy Prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin said that Lim was undermining Johor by portraying the state in a negative light and making it appear an unsuitable investment destination.

Undaunted, MCA President Dr Chua Soi Lek urged the Johor state government to protest at the Chief Minister's statement: "If what is recorded is true and is qualified, then I say Lim Guan Eng is a liar. I am from Johor and it is unfair statement to describe Johor as a crime-infested state."

The MCA president cited the reduced crime index and street crime in Johor and further criticised Lim.

In Johor Baru, several Pasir Gudang Umno Youth members expressed their outrage at Lim, by burning pictures of him.

Joining in the public flogging, was the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents whose secretary-general Jenny Shabudin, reminded Lim that Johor was part of Malaysia and she expressed shock at his remarks which she claimed would harm the country's tourism industry.

It would be better if these people were to stop and consider if Lim had actually uttered the remarks and if there was any truth in them. Then, they could evaluate if security could be beefed

up in the state, rather than be over sensitive and over-react.

This concerted over-reaction makes one think that there is a very dirty scandal that is being hidden. When will it become public knowledge?

Malaysians have seen a spate of burglaries and personal attacks on their homes, businesses and on the roads, despite what the police and politicians tell them. Acts of thuggery on individuals, or Opposition politicians appear to be on the rise. Amidst all this unease over personal safety, the police claim that crime in the country has gone down.

Barely two months after Lim had allegedly claimed that Johor was unsafe, five men, including a man and his father, had kidnapped and murdered a Singaporean businessman, 56 year-old Sim Chee Yong, after demanding a ransom of RM800,000. They ended up killing Sim in the Kong Kong estuary, four days after the abduction.

Last week, in the early hours of Sunday 1 July, a Singaporean lady, Rita Zahara, became the latest victim when her family was kidnapped yards away from her. The kidnappers drove off with her family in her car.

Although her children, her sister and maid were returned unharmed, they underwent a terrible ordeal but managed to escape alive. Despite placing demands for a ransom, the kidnappers grew tired of waiting and released the people then drove off with the car, a Nissan Sunny and valuables, worth a total of S\$80,000 (RM200,000).

The latest kidnappings were reported in Johor, but there have been kidnappings in other states, like the school teacher Teoh Soo Kim who was found in an oil-palm estate and international student, Nayati Shamelin, from Holland.

At the end of May, Federal CID director Commissioner Bakri Zini brushed-aside claims that kidnap cases were increasing. Kidnapping, he said, were fewer because the Criminal Investigation Department was tracking down and crippling kidnapping syndicates.

He said, "From 2010 to May 15, a total of 80 kidnap-for-ransom cases were reported to the police. Of the number, 59 were solved and 61 victims were returned to safety, either after the ransom was delivered or as a result of police intervention."

Is he saying that there were 80 reported kidnappings in 17 months? Were 19 kidnap victims killed in these 17 months? This averages almost 5 kidnappings per month.

When will the police get their priorities right and serve the rakyat to ensure the safety and security needs of the nation, rather than pandering to the wishes of Umno, the elite and the VVIPs?

The thuggish behaviour of individuals and groups, from across the entire social spectrum, must be checked. The allegations that the police collaborate with gang members must be investigated. These crimes will affect investment in Johor as well as the tourism trade and its associated

industries. These crimes will affect investment in Johor, not the comments made by Lim Guan Eng.

When will the police patrol our streets and be more a more visible presence, rather than hound Opposition politicians or attack people attending rallies to demand free and fair elections? We want a police-force, rather than brute force.

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