

# Will it boil down to 'them versus us'?

## • Comment by Wan Hamidi Hamid

IS the show of strength and bluster by Umno delegates going to have a lasting impact?

From Monday till yesterday, most of the party delegates who took to the rostrum, made it known publicly that the Malays would no longer tolerate any form of threats.

It was a strong message: Don't test us or else...

Many speakers accused leaders of Barisan Nasional component parties of questioning the Malay rights while almost all blamed the Chinese business community for "taking more than what they needed".

The tone, set by Umno Youth, continued yesterday. Malacca representative Hasnoor Sidang Hussein reminded party loyalists that the time had come for the Malays to act against those who undermined the Malay rights.

"Our tolerance... made those who dared to challenge the Malays and Islam become bolder as they felt no action would be taken against them."

Most delegates used the term "Malay rights" interchangeably with "Malay dominance" and "social contract".

At the end of the debate on

economy and education, Perlis delegate Hashim Suboh was more explicit in showing off his anger against the non-Malays when he put a rhetorical question to Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein:

"Datuk Hisham has unsheathed his *keris*, waved his *kerfs*, kissed his fens. We want to ask Datuk Hisham, when is he going to use it?"

In reference to what he alleged as the Education Ministry's weakness in dealing with demands from the Chinese language schools, Hashim said force must be used against those who refused to abide by the social contract.

Just a few hours before, Hishammuddin told reporters that harsh criticism against non-Malays by delegates would not affect the cordial relationship among BN members.

"This is normal. They have a job to do, we have a job to do too.

"But the fundamental issue is our intention and objectives."

Yesterday's debate on the economy, fear of non-Malays, especially the Chinese, taking over the Malay slice of cake dominated the assembly.

Will all this venting of anger invite a negative reaction from those outside the hall?

Will it reinforce stereotypes and

prejudices?

Will it drive a wedge between Malays and non-Malays?

The answer to the three questions is YES.

Researcher Liew Chin long believes the anti-Chinese feelings are building up among Umno members although Abdullah is trying very hard to tone down the situation, with his reform agenda.

"It is as if we are going back to the 1980s," he said.

"The former premier managed to make Singapore and the US our enemies. Now we are back to distrusting each other."

Liew believes the "them versus us" rhetoric could lead to further polarisation.

"People who were vilified will feel offended. But I don't think we're violent.

"Most probably people will express their views during elections.

"For outsiders, they might not want to invest in Malaysia, believing some thing is wrong here while some Malaysians may leave the country," he added.

Political analyst Amir Sari believes that Umno delegates' anger towards non-Malays could help obscure Chinese organisations gain some prominence and push some Chinese chauvinists to the fore.