

MCA's misplaced priority: Praising China, attacking Dr M
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COMMENT | With little else to offer, MCA appears to have firmly hitched its wagon to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in a desperate attempt to stay relevant. No surprise then that they have emerged as China's loudest local trumpeters.

At a gathering last week with the newly-minted PRC ambassador, MCA president Liow Tiong Lai launched a blistering attack against opposition leader Dr Mahathir Mohammad accusing him of attempting to wreck bilateral relations with China. Mahathir, he said, was "creating unnecessary fears among Malaysians over Chinese investments."

Attacking Mahathir might, of course, win the MCA some brownie points from Umno but it is unlikely to influence voters. And playing the China card is simply not enough to overcome the party's dismal record of defending the legitimate interests of minority communities.

Gushing forth enthusiastically about the relationship with China, Liow was also quoted as saying that "relations between Malaysia and China are not built on interest but on genuine friendship."

What a load of baloney! Only fools build bilateral or multilateral relations on the basis of sentiment. In international affairs, there are no permanent friends or enemies; only permanent interests.

It is precisely this kind of muddled, misguided, mushy-gushy, wishy-washy approach to bilateral relations that have increasingly put us at a disadvantage vis-à-vis China, already a master in the art of bending feeble nations to its will.

Anyone who deals with China will quickly know that they are not sentimental; they know exactly what they want and pursue it with persistence and determination. Behind the smile and sweet talk is an iron fist; just ask our navy commanders trying to enforce our sovereignty in the South China Sea.

Hopefully, our diplomats are not so starry-eyed about China or any other nation for that matter.

In defence of CCP

Liow also went on to defend the Communist Party of China (CCP) against allegations that it is trying to colonise Malaysia.

The CCP must, no doubt, be cooing with delight that it has such stalwart local defenders. At this rate, China might not even need an ambassador here!

The dictionary defines “colonise” as “sending settlers to a place with the intention of establishing political control over it.” These days economic leverage is sufficient to dominate and control, especially when there are compliant local partners.

Whatever it is, anyone who accuses Mahathir of being anti-China is simply ignorant of history.

Mahathir was the one who really opened up Malaysia-China relations with his ground-breaking visit and discussions with Deng Xiaoping in 1985. Despite the reservations of some of his colleagues in cabinet, Mahathir pressed ahead with the full normalisation of relations. Our relations with China are what they are today in no small part due to Mahathir’s farsightedness and courage.

He also worked tirelessly to involve China in the emerging regional economic and security infrastructure through initiatives like the East Asia Economic Caucus and the Asean dialogue mechanism.

Until he broke ranks with Umno, Mahathir was always feted as a great statesman in Beijing, another reminder that China doesn’t have permanent friends, only permanent interests.

Genuine concerns

What concerns Mahathir, as well as many others, is simply the lack of transparency and the disadvantageous terms we seem to end up with in so many of these China projects. The East Coast Rail Line(ECRL), for example, has been panned by economists as grossly overpriced, economically unviable, and slanted too heavily in China’s favour.

As well, Mahathir is rightly concerned about why we are suddenly borrowing huge sums of money to fund massive infrastructure projects that the government has yet to prove are really necessary.

Why is there a need, for example, to suddenly upgrade or build several [new ports](#) along the west coast when existing ports are not fully utilised? China itself has made no commitment to using all these expensive ports they are now building for us.

It's one thing if China wants to invest its own money in infrastructure projects as part of its One Belt One Road (Obor) initiative, but getting us to borrow from China to build projects that arguably serve China's strategic goals, promote China's industries and expertise and employ Chinese labour, makes no sense at all.

Even BN lawmaker and former finance minister, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, no friend of Mahathir, expressed alarm over the government's ballooning debt which stood at a staggering RM687.43 billion last year.

Furthermore, given Malaysia's horrendous record of corruption, lax oversight and mismanagement, should we not be concerned that these projects might end up as yet another burden on taxpayers?

Has the MCA forgotten about the Port Klang Free Zone (PKRZ) fiasco?

And for that - for demanding a better deal for Malaysia, for insisting on transparency and proper project governance - the MCA sees fit to slam Mahathir in front of the PRC ambassador.

China is, of course, a close neighbour, a big power and an important economic partner; good relations is not an option but a necessity.

However, wanting to ensure that relations with China (as with other countries) serve Malaysia's interests above all else cannot be wrong. If the MCA cannot see that, its priorities are clearly messed up.