

by A Kadir Jasin

Of Potholes and 'Pinocchio' Bush

Potholes, perhaps a symbol of a greater malaise threatening the smooth governance of Malaysia, seem to be a perpetual thorn in our side, as is the re-election of a 'not-so-honest' President George W Bush to world peace.

CONTINUING our saga of the *orang biasa* (ordinary people) versus the *orang luar biasa* (extraordinary people), allow me to further point to the daily plight of the former.

These are the headaches the latter – the ministers and high officials – may not encounter or be aware of. Or even if they are, these woes would affect them differently and, more often than not, less severely than they would ordinary people.

Take potholes for example. Either the devil is playing tricks on my mind or I am suffering from a severe vision problem, but I have a feeling that there are more potholes on our roads today than there were months ago.

Everywhere you go these days, you either fall into one or have to swerve violently to avoid falling into one. And if you travel regularly on a particular road or alley, you will discover that the potholes remain unfilled for days or even weeks on end.

When the JKR (Public Works Department), the local councils or private maintenance companies finally fill them, they would reappear in a matter of days or even hours.

Ever seen those clueless maintenance workers pouring bitumen into water-filled potholes and compacting them with their shovels and *changkul*?

Where are the highway engineers and technicians? Where are the diligent JKR *mandore*? Answer - the engineers are either too busy with paperwork in their cozy air-conditioned offices or 'networking' on golf courses. The technicians have become so numerous that nobody cares whether they do their work or not. There is no longer pride in doing a good job. And those diligent JKR *mandore* have long retired or made redundant when PWD no longer built roads. The only sight of them is when you read obituaries in the newspapers announcing the death of Mr So-and-so who was a PWD *mandore* in Tampin or Taiping.

So, what has happened to JKR's lofty slogan – *Jasa Kepada Rakyat* (Service to the People)? If I understand Works Minister Datuk Seri S Samy Vellu correctly from his ongoing newspaper debate, JKR is powerless and without functions.

Like the zillions of slogans we display on signboards and sing on radio and television, usually in bad English and Bahasa Malaysia, they are essentially for show. As it stands today, the more appropriate tagline for JKR would be *Jatuh Kereta Rosak*. Those potholes can not only burst your tyres, but also swallow an entire car – another unintended example of *Malaysia Boleh* (Malaysia Can).

Who cares about *jasa* (service) and *kecemerlangan* (excellence) when you get

paid irrespective of whether you do your work or not, and even have a bonus thrown in on top of that?

In this country, everybody expects to be rewarded but nobody talks about punishment. So we reward mediocrity and sloppiness with salary increments, bonuses and *pingat khidmat cemerlang* (excellent service medals).

No wonder the much-vaunted meritocracy has become the subject of so many coffee-shop jokes. One has it as *mengarutocracy* – from the Malay word *mengarut* which roughly means farcical or ludicrous.

This *tidak apa* (never mind) attitude has even spread to the private sector, where despite talk of productivity and ISO certification, the quality of work leaves much to be desired.

Wanted: More responsible leaders

SO, how can we start talking about a First World maintenance culture when we are not even aware that we have potholes the size of a small wading pool in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya?

Why bother about broken roads and burst water mains in Lana Bulu and Kampong Bongek when we have as many potholes, broken mains, landslides and overflowing manholes in the Vision City of Kuala Lumpur?

Where have all the *Wakil Rakyat* gone? Did they not promise the skies and the heavens to the people in the March general election? The poor suckers (this one included) swallowed them hook, line and sinker.

If they are doing their job, then why do we have stories of abject poverty and destitution being regularly highlighted by newspapers and private television stations? Why is Datuk Michael Chong of the MCA Public Complaints Bureau still so sought after by the desperate and the needy after all these years?

Never mind Radio and Television

Malaysia (RTM). It is too busy 'infotaining' us. Maybe this is because the *Yang Berhormat* are not as ordinary as the *rakyat biasa*. They ride in bigger and more comfortable cars. In the rural areas, they brave the potholes and the flooded roads in their driven four-wheel vehicles. The luckier ones fly in helicopters on official budget.

The highest of them travel in motorcades led by police outriders and pilot cars. They travel on the choicest of roads. Before they visit faraway places, the roads are inspected and repaired. It is not uncommon for the entire stretch that they travel on to be

resurfaced.

Forget Lana Bulu and Kampong Bongek. If you were observant enough, you would notice that the roads and other public amenities in Kuala Lumpur have deteriorated since the seat of the government moved to Putrajaya.

These days, you have to have sufficiently good eyesight and driving skills to avoid falling into Kuala Lumpur's potholes and trenches. (Alas, even the brand new Putrajaya is not spared the bad traffic jams, parking problems and flash floods — so much for planning).

As it stands today, the more appropriate tagline for JKR would be *Jatuh Kereta Rosak*. Those potholes can not

only burst your tyres, but also swallow an entire car — another unintended example of *Malaysia Boleh* (Malaysia Can).



KUALITI penurapan jalan yang baru dikorek sering dipersoalkan. Biasanya turapan itu akan mulai terhakis selepas beberapa ketika diturap.

Jalan rosak mengancam pengguna kerdil

KUALA LUMPUR 22 Nov. — Polis telah meminta kerjasama Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) supaya menurap segera jalan berlubang yang telah dikenal pasti membahayakan nyawa pengguna terutama penunggang dan pembonceng motosikal. Ketua Trafik Kuala Lumpur, Asisten Supritendan Tun Hisan Tun Hamzah berkata, terdapat 32 jalan berlubang di sekitar Kuala Lumpur yang perlu diambil tindakan segera.

"Memang ada kebenarannya jika dikatakan jalan yang berlubang menyebabkan

berlakunya kemalangan terutamanya yang membabitkan penunggang motosikal.

"Ini kerana jalan raya berlubang tidak memberi amaran bagi seseorang pengguna terutama penunggang motosikal apalagi bagi mereka yang tidak begitu biasa dengan jalan berkenaan," katanya kepada *Utusan Malaysia*.

Beliau memberi contoh bagaimana pemandu kereta yang cuba mengelak daripada termasuk ke dalam lubang, akan membuatkan mereka mengemut atau mengelak sedikit. Ini secara mengejut atau mengelak sedikit membahayakan kenderaan yang mengemut atau mengelak sedikit.

An Utusan Malaysia report dated Nov 23, 2004 on the danger posed by unsightly potholes on our roads

The other day while driving in the rain through the old part of Kuala Lumpur from Jalan Ampang to Bangsar, I counted at least six or seven spots where the roads had turned to drains because the outlets that channelled the water to the *longkang* were clogged.

The covered discharge outlets are pleasing to the eye and safer for pedestrians, but they have also become a convenient place for street sweepers to shove debris in when the City Hall *penyelia* are not looking.

And I must express my reservations about the diligence of the City Hall. Of course, Kuala Lumpur is cleaner and more orderly than most Asian cities. Here I am not comparing Kuala Lumpur with Bangkok or Manila. I am comparing Kuala Lumpur with Singapore (do I hear a chorus of condemnation?) and more so with itself. The city used to be better maintained.

It does not help make the *orang biasa* and the taxpayers feel better to hear of ministers and Menteri Besar lamenting the poor maintenance of public facilities if nothing is

done. They should stop whining and get on with the job.

The problem is nobody seems to be taking responsibility and no one is being punished for failing to keep public amenities in reasonably good conditions.

RISING MILITANCY: WHOSE FAULT IS IT ANYWAY?

BRITISH Prime Minister Tony Blair has pleaded with European leaders not to mock United States President George W Bush.

Blair's pathetic call is wholly understandable because mocking Bush is as good as mocking him. Blair is, after all, a carbon copy of Bush in the so-called war against terrorism.

Thanks to their invasion and occupation of Iraq, terrorism has become even more widespread with the support for militancy increasing.

As former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad told Bloomberg Television in a recent interview, while governments around the world are careful about expressing their views on American expansionism, the people feel differently.

The occupation of Muslim Iraq by an essentially Christian force cannot be a good thing for inter-faith tolerance and co-operation globally.

American high-handedness in Iraq and Afghanistan has inspired similar trends in Russia and, more recently, Thailand. In response to people seeking a better deal for themselves and their faiths, governments around the world seem to be more willing to resort to brute force.

America and its rag-tag allies have legitimised the use of force against civilian protestors and people seeking political rights. The world today is far less safe than when Bush and his neo-conservative hawks launched the war on terror in the aftermath of the Sept 11, 2001 attacks on New York's World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon.

The attackers of the WTC and the Pentagon all died a fiery death along with their victims, but the way the Americans have been treating Muslims since then has not only martyred them in the eyes of radical Muslims, but also alienated the moderate ones.

Today, even the most moderate and liberal-minded of Muslims have lost the ability to defend the legitimacy of the global war on terrorism when tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians are being maimed and killed by the US and its allies.

Little wonder then that Osama bin Laden is enjoying rising respect, albeit covertly, among Muslims around the world. He is seen as the only man willing to stake his life and limbs to challenge American hegemony, never mind if his objectives are not as well defined as that.

WAR: AN AMERICAN INSTITUTION

AS French President Jacques Chirac told an interviewer on the eve of his visit to Britain recently, the situation in Iraq has helped to prompt an increase in terrorism.

Today, even the most moderate and liberal-minded of Muslims have lost the ability to defend the legitimacy of the global war on terrorism when tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians are being maimed and killed by the US and its allies. Little wonder then that Osama bin Laden is enjoying rising respect, albeit covertly, among Muslims around the world.

To a certain extent, said the French President, Saddam Hussein's departure was a positive thing but it also provoked reactions, such as the mobilisation in a number of countries of men and women of Islam, which has made the world more dangerous.

With the re-election of President Bush for a second term, we can no longer separate the American people from the killing of the Iraqis, irrespective of whether it was carried out by American forces or the forces opposed to US occupation.

By retaining Bush, the American people have confirmed their support for the invasion and occupation of Iraq even though it had been proven that Saddam did not have any weapons of mass destruction and he was not linked to al-Qaeda.

For that, the American people must be

prepared to face the possibility that they will become the object of hate and derision, particularly in the Muslim world.

They are today as culpable as Bush and his warmongering neo-conservatives for the killing of every Iraqi child, woman and old man.

Either because they are ignorant about the wider world or indifferent to the suffering of others, Americans seem to agree with Bush that the use of brute force is the way to go in the post-Cold War era.

The reality is, with America emerging as the sole super power in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, war has become Washington's preferred tool for achieving diplomatic and economic supremacy.

In re-electing Bush, American voters have resurrected a modern-day Pinocchio. Italian Carlo Collodi, whose real name was Carlo Lorenzini (1826-1890), created Pinocchio for the amusement of his young readers, but

the Americans seem to take the fairy-tale character seriously.

So, the more Bush lied to them and the longer his proverbial nose grew, the more they sympathised and empathised with him. That should not come as a surprise to us. Many comic book characters, Hollywood B-Grade actors and cattle farmers have ended up in the White House.

So, why should we be shocked if the Iraqis and the Afghans and before that the Vietnamese were hunted down. After all, that was precisely what the early European settlers did to the native Indians when they refused to accept the American way. **mb**

E-mail: akadirjasin@beritapub.com.my
Besides 'Malaysian Business', Kadir also contributes to local Bahasa Malaysia and English newspapers. These articles can be accessed at www.beritapublishing.com.my under the heading 'In My Own Write'.