



Umno Youth's Silence is Deafening

Umno Youth's spirited call for the reinstatement of the New Economic Policy at the last Umno annual general assembly has come in for a lot of flak. But why isn't the movement defending its stand?

BEFORE commencing last year's annual general assembly, Umno Youth swore by the *keris* (a Malay dagger) to uphold '*maruah bangsa*'. *Maruah* in Bahasa Malaysia means dignity and *bangsa* refers to the Malay race.

The ceremony was led by the movement's chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, who is also Education Minister.

But that was not the first time the movement had evoked the symbolic power of the *keris*. In 1987, its then chief, Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Abdul Razak, also swore by the *keris* to defend the *maruah bangsa* at an emotionally charged gathering at the TPCA Stadium in Kampung Baru.

He barely escaped arrest under the Internal Security Act. But a handful of alleged organisers of the gathering weren't so lucky.

At the assembly proper, Khairy Jamaluddin, the movement's newly minted deputy chief, albeit without contest, transformed himself into a *pejuang bangsa* (the champion of the Malays) by demanding the revival of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The youth resolution was wholeheartedly adopted as one of the assembly's key policies.

Much has since been said and deliberated on. My understanding is that the NEP, or something akin to it, will be implemented, starting with the Ninth Malaysia Plan, which comes into effect this year.

Ironically, though, the movement was completely silent when a *New Sunday Times* columnist, on the last Christmas day, criticised its urging of the revival of the NEP.

He considered the movement's proposal as being the most unhelpful statement of the year just past, which, in his view, was a devised one. His leading weekend column was headlined: 'Notes from a divisive year'.

From the writer's point of view, the most unhelpful argument of the year was: 'When Umno Youth re-floated the New Economic Policy (NEP) at the party's general assembly this year, what they did was put the country on a regressive mode.'

He continued: 'Instead of preparing the country for the onslaught of competition from Thailand, Vietnam and other emerging economies, here we are still wondering about competition between Malays and non-Malays.'

Growth-with-distribution policy the way to go

AT the point of writing, which was more than three weeks after the stinging criticism, I was yet to come across a response or reply from Umno Youth.

Maybe the movement's leaders have not read the column or maybe they think they should neither honour nor humour the newspaper with a response.

I would not dare speculate that the movement has fallen victim to the expanding culture of silence affecting the party, or that the movement's leaders are too busy pursuing their political and corporate ambitions, including threatening others with legal suits, to bother themselves with a newspaper column.

Khairy and his ECMLibra partners, as we have been informed by the Press, are threatening to sue the Kelantan Pas Executive Council Member Husam Musa for questioning Khairy's 3% purchase of ECMLibra shares for RM9.2 million recently.

The stakes are high for Khairy and his business partners. ECMLibra is a company on the move. It is negotiating a merger with Avenue Capital Resources to create one of the country's largest investment banks with shareholders funds of over RM800 million.

Or has the *New Sunday Times*, a member of the Umno-linked New Straits Times Press (M) group, lost its bite that its criticism of the party is no longer viewed with concern?

On my part, I agree totally with the writer on the need for the country to be competitive. We have to gear ourselves up for not only regional but also global competition.

I am afraid that in several areas, we have lost out to Thailand. That country has always been ahead of us in food production and tourism. This is in part due to the fact that it has a larger land mass, more cultivable land and lower labour costs. But in recent decades, Thailand has also progressed in manufacturing and services other than tourism.

There are lessons that we can now learn from the Thais. Since the same columnist, in comparing Malaysia with Thailand, also indicated his preference for an open economy, I think the Thai lesson is important.

To begin with, Thailand is almost a homogeneous

country. Some 75% of its population are Thais and are mostly Buddhists. Literally, everybody uses Thai names and speaks the Thai language. The minorities, if we are to believe foreign correspondents' dispatches from Thailand, are being neglected or are even being persecuted.

Look to the past

IN Malaysia, on the other hand, some minority groups are doing better than the majority.

Being a multi-racial and multi-religious country, we can neither accept the tyranny of the majority nor the monopoly of the minority.

Thus, growth with distribution and the eradication of poverty irrespective of race, which were the core objectives of the NEP, are still the best bet for us.

Freedom and rights aside, we must always be reminded of our past experiences – good and evil. Thus, it is for this reason that I congratulate Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for acting swiftly and forcefully on the issue of the constitutional amendment raised by his non-Muslim ministers.

I agree with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Abdul Razak that it would have been better for the ministers to have raised the issue verbally, say in the Cabinet, than sending a memorandum.

But the ministers must have their own reasons for sending a memorandum instead of raising the matter verbally. I see this as some sort of 'political posturing' which could get out of control unless wisely and judiciously handled. That they have withdrawn the memorandum is immaterial. They have made their point.

Barisan Nasional parties must be reminded of the 1987 incident that led to *Operasi Lalang*. It started out as a harmless debate about the appointment of non-Chinese educated teachers as senior assistants in Chinese schools, but turned into a major racial issue.

They should always bear in mind that their agenda could easily be hijacked by others, who are not tied to the coalition's decorum and limitations. Back then, there were notions that the-then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was weak because he was being challenged by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Tan Sri Musa Hitam for the control of Umno.

That's an order ...

AS for globalisation and free trade, even the open-minded and liberal Thais, if we can consider them such, are beginning to be wary of their effects.

So, recently they held a massive demonstration in Chiang Mai to protest against the free trade negotiations between their government and the United States. They fear that the agreement would hurt their farmers and reduce access to medicine.

As is the case with most industrialised nations, the US demands are pretty much the same - access to the market for farm products, control on drug patents and liberalisation of the financial sector.

Gearing up for competition yes, but succumbing to the pressure of the industrialised economies no. It is for this reason that we must understand what our government is doing on the global stage.

Take, for instance, the Japan-Malaysia Economic Partnership Agreement, which was signed by the Prime Ministers of the two countries on Dec 13 last year. It should be more widely publicised and discussed.

It is a good thing that the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (Miti) has put up the agreement, which also encompasses the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), on its website - www.miti.gov.my. It was only recently posted - Jan 12, if I am not mistaken.

This is not only in line with the transparency and accountability pledge, but also wholly consistent with the e-government concept. If more people are aware of the contents of the agreement, they could take advantage of it to promote trade with Japan like selling more *garcinia mangostana*, *parkia speciosa*, *pithecellobium jiringa* and *pithecellobium bubalinum* to the Land of the Rising Sun.

Otherwise, only the lucky few with connections to the ministry would be able to take advantage of the FTA. Surely, we do not want the approved permit (AP) fiasco to be repeated with our durians, mangosteens and other products that we can buy and sell with Japan.

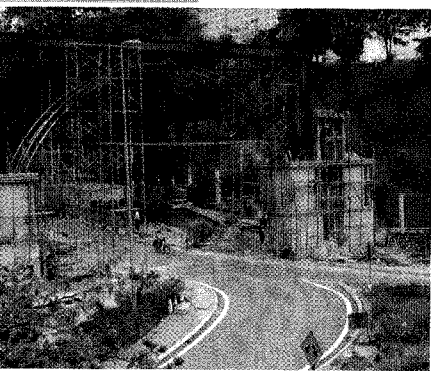
And since Japan, based on what we have so far heard of the agreement, would have freer access to our automotive market, we would like to know what new and cheaper Japanese cars we would be able to buy if and when we ever decide to junk our Protons.

Incidentally, more than a week after the Prime Minister instructed Proton's new management to explain to the public the aborted collaboration with Germany's Volkswagen, no such explanation had been forthcoming.

Does this mean that the Prime Minister's instruction, which was widely reported by the newspapers, is not urgent enough for Proton's management or they do not have a plausible story to tell?

According to Volkswagen's Chief Executive Bernd Pischetsrieder, the partnership was aborted because 'we had specific ideas on how we want to proceed there (at Proton). Unfortunately, the Malaysian Government and Proton had other ideas.'

PHOTOSHOOT



Does a government ministry need to lavish taxpayers' money on a structure like this? This ministry is located in Kuala Lumpur

YTL'S POWER CALL

TALKING about openness and the spin by the media and market analysts, I am baffled by continued claims by some quarters that the government is favouring YTL Power International Bhd in gas supply by Petronas and the purchase of power by Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB).

The grapevine has it that YTL Power could be in for a windfall or may have already enjoyed one. They say that the government, after years of appeals by the company, recently granted it the right to a discount of RM1 for every mmbtu of gas it purchased for its Paka power plant in Terengganu.

This, they add, is on top of TNB agreeing to purchase the additional and remaining YTL Power output at 13.5 sen per kWh (kilowatt hour) of dispatchable energy.

The background to this is this: In May 1997, the government decided that the gas price for the power sector should be capped at RM6.40 per mmbtu.

Accordingly, the YTL Power RM1 discount was suspended. In October 2002, the Cabinet decided that

the RM6.40 price would continue until December 2005. The RM1 discount was enjoyed by YTL Power only on account that its plant in Paka is close to the gas supply source and as such no additional piping cost is needed.

But despite the price of gas being capped, YTL Power continues to demand for the reinstatement of the rebate.

At stake is a repayment ranging from RM156 million to as high as RM354.55 million by Petronas, the gas supplier.

What effect this claim would have on the overall industry may take some time to gauge. But one industry source says should the rebate be reinstated, YTL Power's productivity and efficiency would improve significantly overnight.

The worry is that some of the more efficient power plants belonging to TNB and other Independent Power Producers (IPPs) may have to be de-loaded during the off-peak periods to accommodate YTL Power's higher output and uptake by TNB.

OF HUMAN SACRIFICE AND SHORT MEMORIES

HUMAN sacrifice continues in our beloved country. But unlike a similar practice in the old cultures way back in the dark ages, the outcome is questionable.

In the old cultures, human beings were sacrificed to appease the gods. In return, the gods gave them rain, bumper harvests and victories over enemies.

In 21st Century Malaysia, such a sacrifice, according to newspaper reports, makes the gods angry and unhappy. *Dukacita* (sad) and *kecewa* (disappointed), says the Malay Press.

The bigger the sacrifice, the sadder the gods. *Amat dukacita* (very sad), says the Malay Press.

A recent high-profile human sacrifice that caught the attention of the most important gods in the land involved a key member of the celebrated Ethos Consultancy, Dr Liew Boon Yoong, 35.

He died instantly when a half-tonne concrete slab fell onto his BMW car from the top of a 20-storey building at Plaza Damas in the posh Sri Hartamas development.


Important gods made a beeline to the martyr's home and spoke angrily of the safety standards at construction sites. And, in a godly disposition, they threatened to punish

the perpetrators with the harshest punishment in the land and hastily issued a stop-work order.

But alas, the gods are forgetful and forgiving. Soon, the sadness was gone and the anger subsided. Nothing much has happened and the sacrifice continues at construction sites, on the roads and in the factories, and in secluded places where girls and young women are being raped and murdered.

WHEN A PRO CHALLENGES THE CABINET

FINALLY, what can be more distressing than when one of the country's largest mainstream and party-controlled newspapers (*The Star*) sees it fit to front-page a report that the Federal Territory (Islamic) Religious Department is defying the Cabinet on the strength of a statement by its public relations officer (a man by the name of Idris Hussein).

I rest my case. 

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