



Please Do Not Blow Up Your Lovers

Malaysia often catches the world's eye, and often for the wrong reasons – its ISA, the ear-squat controversy, the haze, and now a sensational murder.

WHEN WE EMBRACED GLOBALISATION AND PROMISED THE WORLD that we are serious about transparency, accountability and openness, we must be willing to subject ourselves to greater scrutiny.

The world has always had a negative view of us since the day we became independent almost 50 years ago. While it recognises our multi-ethnicity, it condemns the privileges of the native people.

Over the years, however, thanks to our political stability and sterling economic achievement, we are generally forgiven for our sins of instituting and practising what has become known as draconian laws and practices.

In the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, for instance, the West, America in particular, is pretty pleased that we have the Internal Security Act (ISA), which enables us to act swiftly against militants.

America under George W Bush has introduced many draconian laws and practices that make the ISA pale in comparison. It today runs one of the biggest concentration camps at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and a series of clandestine detention centres for alleged terrorists around the world.

But that does not spare us from being continuously monitored and rated by western-based economic institutions, think tanks and human rights organisations.

For several years now, our international ratings in a score of areas have been on the decline. Some are due to actual developments like slower economic growth, lower foreign direct investment flows, an uninspiring capital market and higher inflation, but others are based on perception.

The latter is difficult to handle. There is, for instance, the perception that the economy in the post-Mahathir era lacks direction and clear indications.

The most problematic one is Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. Malaysia fell five notches from 39, out of 158 countries surveyed in 2004, to 44 out of 163 in 2005.

To a degree, the lower score is the Government's own doing. The Abdullah Administration took a crusading stance against corruption when it came to power at the end of 2003.

But as have been often quoted by foreign reports and analyses, the assault on corruption fizzled out after two high-profiled trials

involving the Mahathir-era cases. They are the criminal breach of trust (CBT) charge against the former Perwaja managing director, Tan Sri Eric Chia, and another against a former cabinet minister, Tan Sri Kasitah Gadam.

A typical foreign reaction to this crusade was a 2004-report by Japan's Kyodo news agency. It said: When Abdullah, 64, took the baton from feisty Mahathir Mohamad on Oct 31 last year, he pledged to fight corruption and to promote democracy and political reform, issues observers felt had been neglected by Mahathir in his 22 years in power. But the drive appears to have stalled.

That was a year after Abdullah took over power. He has now completed his third year. The falling rating is only to be expected. The perception was that the new government would act on corruption cases investigated during the Mahathir era and stop new cases from happening.

But as Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself had openly said, one important case involving another former minister had yet to be brought to court. He said the case was ready to be taken to court months before his retirement. On the contrary, he claimed, this person had since been given an important party post in Umno.

Although Transparency International's index was based on perception of the people it surveyed, the psychological impact of its report is, nevertheless, important. In a rapidly globalising economic environment, many decisions are made based on perception and forecasts as much as on facts and figures.

So managing perception is a key component in attracting foreign investment and promoting tourism. To an analyst sitting in front of a computer terminal in Zurich or London, the haze in Kuala Lumpur could give the impression that the whole country is burning.

And the cruel murder of a Mongolian model could create an impression in France, where she had her modeling training, and in faraway Mongolia and other places where the news was published, that Malaysia is a very dangerous place.

A matter of grave importance

SO, taking the incident seriously is a matter of grave importance. At a glance, therefore, *The Star* newspaper's Nov 9 report

headlined 'PM Asks Death of Mongolian Model To Be Thoroughly Investigated' was unnecessary.

Logically, that's what the police should do as a matter of practice. Unfortunately, as many criminal cases had shown, that is not always the case. Several sensational murder cases were thrown out of the courts and the suspects freed because of shoddy police investigation.

A crime is a crime, whether it is perpetrated against a king or a pauper. In the case referred to by Abdullah, who is also the minister-in-charge of the police, neither a king nor pauper was the victim.

The murdered person, Altantuya Shaariibuu, was a beautiful Mongolian fashion model and a mother of a 16-month-old boy. The fact that she was a Mongolian was sufficient to make the crime special. There aren't that many Mongolians visiting Malaysia in the very first place.

We have become used to capital crimes perpetrated against or by Indonesian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Filipino and Thai immigrants. We had taken them for granted because they were faceless and nameless, and there were so many of them here in our country.

That, in fact, is a very negative, inhumane attitude. They are human beings like us and when we admitted them into our country, we were, in accordance with international law, responsible for their well-being and safety.

But the case involving this unfortunate 28-year-old Mongolian woman is not ordinary. Thus, the Prime Minister's instruction that the police carry out the most detailed investigation is reasonable and necessary.

At stake is the reputation of the Government, in particular the offices of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and, most of all, the police itself. Sensational is too soft a word. Arrested and remanded for interrogation were people, directly and indirectly, linked to the offices of the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Coincidence it may be, but the truth will either set them free or implicate them in this gruesome crime.

One of the prime suspects is a long-time associate and adviser to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Abdul Razak, and the other remanded persons are police personnel assigned to guard Abdullah and Najib. What could be more sensational than a Prime Minister's G Man being arrested immediately upon his arrival from an overseas security duty with 'the man' himself?

From media reports, we understand that at least four police personnel, including a chief inspector, who are members of the Unit Tindakan Khas (UTK), have been arrested and remanded. They are among Special Operations Unit personnel regularly

assigned to provide security cover for the Prime Minister and his deputy.

Given the sensational nature of the crime – a young woman taken away by the police, shot and her body blown up – there is little surprise that John le Carre-type theories abound.

Irrespective of the outcome of the case, the image of the police and, to a significant degree the Government's, is at stake. For the former, it is another case of bad officers bringing further disrepute to the service. This will not render the job of the new Inspector-General of Police, Tan Sri Musa Hassan, to clean up the service any easier.

Coming not too long after the ear-squat case that saw a cabinet minister scrambling to China to apologise for something that turned out to be totally unnecessary, this case has to be thoroughly investigated and its outcome handed to the Attorney-General's Chamber as speedily as possible.

It is useful to remind ourselves that hasty political decisions can be embarrassingly costly and totally ineffectual. In the case of

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the ear-squat incident, the victim was neither a Chinese national nor even a Malaysian Chinese.

She was a pregnant Malay housewife who has since filed a multi-million ringgit suit against the Government and the police. There are now many cases of the *rakyat* suing the Government and the police for wrongful arrest and detention.

With this kind of expose, I must confess that I sometimes wonder just how safe our Prime Minister and other *pembesar* (VIPs) are in the hands of their police guards?

And do we use Special Operations Unit personnel for peaceful crisis resolution? To my simple mind, we call in the UTK when all attempts at resolving a crisis peacefully have fail.

The Prime Minister promised to set up the proposed Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC) when the ear-squat incident was exposed earlier in the year. Nothing has happened so far and I am not about to speculate that the murder of the Mongolian woman would hasten the process.

But for the sake of this beloved country, I do hope that the police

take very, very seriously the Prime Minister's instruction to investigate the case thoroughly and properly. 'Nobody is above the law. That should be remembered,' Abdullah told reporters.

Sadly, this and other serious crimes are taking place at a time when more visitors are coming to our country and we are in the midst of promoting the Visit Malaysia Year 2007 (VMY).

With the news of her murder splashed on the front pages of the newspapers in Ulan Bator, I am afraid that the Tourism Minister, Tengku Datuk Adnan Mansor, may not have much success encouraging hordes of Mongolians to come to Malaysia.

And to make sure that he has better success elsewhere, it does not do any harm for me to humbly propose that our Tourism Minister undergo *mandi bunga* (flower bath) to cleanse himself and his ministry of bad luck.

With many sectors of the economy not at the top of their performance, we need the tourist dollar. We must collectively ensure that VMY 2007 is a success.

So, this is my plea to fellow Malaysians, men and women: If you feel the urge to blow up your troublesome lover to bits, could you please not do it now or during VMY?

Who knows, after a whole year of enjoying the VMY festivities, you might lose the urge to blow up each other. You might even kiss and make up. Love, after all, is a many splendoured thing. And crime is not *hadhari*-compliant.

Mat Rempit, Mat Spanar and other demeaning labels

AND as the debate on who owns what in this beloved land of ours rages on, I would like to plea on behalf of the Mat and Minah Rempit. Please to not exclude them from our continuing quest to create more wealth and to distribute it more equitably.

I am very sure that if we succeed in creating more wealth and distributing it more equitably, we may even be able to solve the Mat Rempit and other social ills, which are, more often than not, so conveniently attributed to the Malays and other Bumiputeras.

That should relieve the enthusiastic Putera Umno (Prince of Umno) chief Datuk Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim of the headache of trying to make gentlemen and ladies of the Mat and Minah Rempit.

I hate to use the term Mat Rempit. Let's call them *kapcai* (small capacity motorcycles) riders or illegal racers, whichever is more appropriate. Mat Rempit is another example of unconsciously identifying all things negative with the Malays.

It is actually quite sad that for things that are negative or are not respectable, we love to give them Malay names and labels. So illegal motorcycle racers, irrespective of whether they are Malays, Ibans, Kadazans, Chinese, Indians or immigrants, are called Mat

Rempit.

I am yet to hear the Prince of Umno, the police or the Press referring to them as Chai Rempit or Muthu Rempit. I am sure there are Chinese, Indians, Kadazans and Ibans who are involved in illegal racing.

I have the sneaky suspicion that the organisers of illegal racings and the chaps who make all the money taking up bets, selling the *kapcai* motorcycles and modifying them are not Malays. If they are, I am pleased.

The suppliers and modifiers of *kapcais* are certainly not Malays.

Again, if they are, I am happy and I'll immediately and whole-heartedly embrace the Mat and Minah Rempit culture.

Some years ago, when promiscuity among factory workers hit the headlines, the blame fell on the Mat Spanar (spanner) and Minah Karan (current). I am sure the non-Malay workers were equally promiscuous but we did not hear them being labelled Chai Spanar, Muthu Spanar or Minachi Karan.

It puzzles me that the Malays – including their *pembesar* – love to demean themselves and their race with all kinds of derogatory names, terms and labels. If the Malays were better off economically, they would be driving and racing motorcars instead of small motorcycles.

But they are not. Many of them have to contend with riding the *kapcai*. I am sure if they were more financially able, they would rather be driving a Kancil or a Proton.

Why can't we call them *pelumba haram* (illegal racers) or *pelumba hantu* (ghost racers)? Why is there a need to associate this illegal activity with an iconic Malay name like Mat? Actually Mat is the short form of Ahmad or Muhammad – the latter is the name of the last Prophet of Islam (peace be upon Him).

Still, I am in total agreement with the police that the sternest action be taken against them. Bad enough that they are killing themselves but when they cause death and injury to others, they are a threat.

Thus the Government's decision to amend the laws to include confiscating motorcycles and suspending licences of those taking part in illegal races, and taking legal action against organisers of such races, is welcomed.

The Deputy Prime Minister recently said these proposals had been included in the amendments to the laws relating to illegal racing. **mb**

WITH THIS KIND OF EXPOSE, I MUST CONFESS THAT I SOMETIMES WONDER JUST HOW SAFE OUR PRIME MINISTER AND OTHER *PEMBESAR* (VIPS) ARE IN THE HANDS OF THEIR POLICE GUARDS?