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WHAT WRONG WITH BIG BROTHER?

One of the many reasons -- and they are very many -- advanced by Indonesian leaders to justify their opposition to Malaysia is that we have never paid them the respect due to a Big Brother. Some Indonesian leaders, in particular Dr. Subandrio, have complained that we have never looked to Big Brother for guidance, advice, inspiration and for the salvation of our national soul. I remember Dr. Subandrio complaining in the press some two years ago that Tengku Abdul Rahman had never, as a dutiful younger brother should, made a pilgrimage to Indonesia to sit at the feet of Buang Karno and gather such pearls of wisdom as may be flung at the Tengku.

Even today the Indonesian grouse is that Malaysia is being opposed simply because of our failure to consult Big Brother about it; to inform him about our plans to federate the Malaysian territories. The Indonesians complain that instead the matter was discussed and settled between the British and ourselves and consequently the whole concept of Malaysia is a "neo-colonialist" plot.

At least that is the line they are shooting though, in my view, failure to consult Indonesia is, at best, a secondary cause of confrontation. No amount of "mushawaras" -- brotherly consultations -- I believe can eradicate the more compelling reasons for Indonesia's anti-Malaysia stand. Let us, by all means, have as many mushawaras as the Indonesian leaders want but let us not fall into the error of believing that brotherly back-slapping and professions of mutual regard will conjure confrontation away.

For example, it is not true that Indonesia was not informed of our intentions to form a federation of Malaysia. On the contrary though we were under no obligation to do so, we nevertheless observed the fraternal decencies by informing Indonesian leaders of our intention to form Malaysia. This has been attested by Dr. Subandrio in a letter he wrote to the New York Times on November 1961 and in

a statement he made in the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1961.

I would like to quote from the speech he made at the United Nations, if only to show the hollowness of the present charge that Malaysia is a "neo-colonialist" plot to encircle Indonesia and that we did not inform Big Brother about our intentions.

"We are," said Dr. Subandrio, "not only disclaiming the territories outside the former Netherlands East Indies, though they are of the same island, but -- more than that. -- when Malaya told us of its intention to merge with the three British Crown Colonies of Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo, we told them we had no objections and that we wished them success with this merger so that everyone might live in peace and freedom."

Dr. Subandrio clearly admits here two points which make mockery of current Indonesian propaganda against Malaysia. He admits that Indonesia was told of our intentions to form Malaysia. But even more interesting is that he wished Malaysia success, in order, that "everyone might live in peace and freedom."

So, on November 20, 1961, Malaysia, according to the Indonesians could not have been a British plot, a neo-colonialist device by 10 million Malaysians to encircle and threaten the peace and security of some 100 million Indonesians.

When and why expressions of "success" for Malaysia were converted into threats to "crush" and "devour" Malaysia; why Malaysia from being a means to enable everyone to live "in peace and freedom" became a devilish scheme to threaten peace and security in this area is a matter to which I shall return later.

The point I want to stress here is that we Malaysians would have been only too glad to treat Indonesia as a Big Brother had Indonesia behaved like a helpful and intelligent Big Brother. And the tragedy of the whole thing is that Indonesia has all the potentialities to successfully play the role of a Big Brother in this region. She has everything to make her into one of the greatest nations of Asia. She has a territory of some 3,000 islands scattered over three thousand miles. Providence has endowed her with natural resources which, so economists calculate, if fully and sensibly exploited could make Indonesia the third

richest country in the world. She has some 100 million gifted and hard-working people to transform the varied natural resources of Indonesia into real wealth.

And, no less important, she has behind her the esteem and regard of the whole of Asia which has been impressed by the courage and vigour of her leaders who fought so hard to free their country from a stubborn and deeply entrenched Dutch imperialism.

Here then was a country favoured by providence as well as by history to have really become a Big Brother to us all in this region. Destiny had offered Indonesia the chance to lead us smaller and less favoured countries towards peace, security and freedom but she threw it away.

Today, some 15 years after the Indonesian revolution it is quite clear that Indonesia far from becoming the Big Brother of South East Asia is becoming the Big Bully of this region. We see gradually unfolding before us not a wise and friendly Big Brother to inspire us into following him but a Big Brother who fills us with anxiety and dismay because he is slowly going to pot.

When Dr. Subandrio and his colleagues bitterly complain that we do not seek Indonesia's advice; that we do not look to Bung Karno for inspiration and leadership it is not because we do not want to. As a small country we are fully conscious that we cannot stand alone in this modern world. We need friends, we need protectors and we need help and guidance. And it is both natural and inevitable that in the ordinary course of events we should have been drawn closer to Indonesia by virtue of geographical proximity, by virtue of our historic and cultural relations with Nusantara, by virtue of our close and sustained trading and commercial links with that country.

But for Indonesia to be freely accepted as a Big Brother she should inspire in us confidence and a feeling of security. The Big Brother must show by deeds and not by words that he is superior to us in wisdom, in ability and rationality. He must convince us by deeds that to follow him and heed his advice is to follow the path of security, prosperity and freedom.

This unfortunately has not been the case. Instead of doing things better than we did, our Big Brother showed himself thriftless, reckless and shiftless in many of the things he did. We saw a potentially rich country slowly relapsing into heart-rending penury. We saw its energetic and gifted people being periodically whipped into emotional paroxysms of rage against this and that, into persecution of racial minorities and what looked to us more parochial and more practical Malaysians as futile chasing of tails.

True from time to time President Soekarno relieved the tragedy of a rich country relapsing into economic misery and administrative chaos by coming out periodically with some new philosophic concept to save Indonesia and humanity. He talked of the romance of revolution; of a guided democracy where the people's will is expressed through the "commands" of a permanently self-elected President. Some time ago President Soekarno who is a great believer in blending bits of other people's philosophy into an incoherent whole was taken in by a phrase used by the late and unlamented Benito Mussolini. He commended this phrase to his followers and I think in a way it succinctly and accurately reflects the mood and temper of Indonesia's present leaders.

The phrase, in Italian, is "vivere pericoloso" -- live dangerously.

This utterance of Il Duce has, I am told, become a favourite with the more desperate of President Soekarno's admirers. A country lives dangerously only when the present becomes unbearable and the future hopeless and uncertain.

Though we in Malaysia have not, until quite recently, criticised the way Indonesian leaders had been going about the business of ruling their country, we felt -- and quite correctly -- that Indonesian leaders had little to offer us by way of guidance or example. It may be that our political philosophy, our style of governing men lacked drama and romance. True the Tengku or Lee Kuan Yew did not invent new and exotic philosophies every six months as exhilarating drugs to make us forget the grim present. Of course there can be no drama or romance in sitting down to plan bridges, roads, houses, electric lights, community centres, factories, schools and trying to balance the budget.

As President Soekarno, once admitted, "economics bore me". It is far more exciting trying to balance one's budget by periodically confiscating other people's property and by borrowing recklessly from foreign friends and even from capitalist, blood-sucking imperialists. It is far more exciting to spend these foreign credits not in improving the livelihood of the people but in building the largest hotel in South-East Asia, in building the largest sports arena, and the largest army in South-East Asia. In December last year, Dr. Subandrio summed up the Indonesian concept of revolution in the following words:

"Indonesia had to neglect her economy purposely to regain her national identity first ... Some people might find it ridiculous that Indonesia gave priority to the revival of her identity and not to economic development."

We in Malaysia do not find this ridiculous. We find it tragic -- tragic that a country so full of promise, a country to which many of us had genuinely looked for leadership and inspiration should openly boast that it had deliberately neglected its economy in pursuit of an intangible something called national identity.

I don't know what the man who is bored with economics, who exhorts his people to live dangerously and the man who confessed that he and his colleagues purposely neglected their country's economy must be feeling today. In Tuesday's newspapers we all read the statement by the Deputy Governor of Central Java that a million people were facing starvation. He told of the thousands of hungry people scavenging the gutters for edible refuse.

And in yesterday's newspapers the "Harian Rakyat", the Indonesian Communist Party newspaper, made quite clear where the responsibility for all this lay. The famine and starvation is not a "neo-colonialist" plot. If, as the Harian Rakyat alleges, families are being forced to sell their daughters into prostitution, the responsibility lies, so the Harian Rakyat says, with failure to control profiteers.

There are other and more fundamental reasons for the present plight of Indonesia and the P.K.I. is as much responsible for the disintegration of Indonesia's economy as mismanagement, corruption and profiteering. The Communists have always worked on the basis that revolutionary fires can be stoked only out of starvation, desperation and a sense of hopelessness. They have by encouraging the non-Communist leaders of Indonesia to neglect their economy in favour of romantic but futile fantasies made the non-Communist leaders pave the way for Communist revolution.

I think it is still not too late for Indonesia's leaders to retrace their steps, to shake off the phantasies which hitherto have passed for profound philosophy. It will need courage and it will need determination and Indonesia's leaders, whatever their shortcomings do not lack either of these things.

I think it is all a question of going back to a few common sense fundamentals of economics and politics. Let us by all means adorn these simple fundamentals with the tinsel of rhetoric and the jewels of philosophic concepts but these must be relevant to present day urgent human needs.

The ultimate goal of politics, of political leadership, is to make life a little better everyday for the ordinary men and women who trusted their rulers with political power. And for the ordinary man meaningful politics begin with food, shelter, clothes, peace, security and the chance through education and other cultural opportunities to seek the refinements of life. These are obvious truths -- so obvious that I hesitate to mention them before an intelligent audience.

And yet it is incredible how in the excitement of politics, leaders can forget these obvious and fundamental truths.

For example, in yesterday's report about the famine in Indonesia I came across this astonishing reaction by the Sulu Indonesia, the Nationalist Party newspaper, to the suffering of its own people. After noting that "hundreds of skinny people known as tramps are now floating into Jakarta" the newspaper went on to observe that "the sight of these hunger victims creates an unfavourable impression on foreigners."

It is not moved to pity or anger that a million men should starve in what is potentially the richest country in Asia. Its concern is with the unfavourable impression that would be created among foreigners.

Another report goes on to say that Indonesia has made no attempt so far to obtain disaster relief from other countries because "the situation is considered a matter of national pride and President Soekarno has publicly denounced the press for treating the problem unsympathetically and unrealistically".

I am not suggesting for one moment that the Indonesian leaders are callous or that they deliberately brought about a situation resulting in famine and starvation for thousands of their countrymen. It is my contention that the present famine, the economic disintegration and even confrontation against Malaysia are the inevitable consequences of a number of political fallacies which have become a part of current Indonesian political thinking. We in Malaysia were aware of these fallacies long ago and of their consequences ultimately for Indonesia. However, as I said earlier, we could not then express our anxieties and misgivings, even in a friendly spirit, publicly. Such friendly criticisms would have been misunderstood and even violently resented as uncalled for intervention in the domestic politics of a neighbour. On the contrary we had to hold our tongue and hope and pray that somehow or other what we feared would never happen. All we could do and did do was to resist the exhortations and pressures of the local lunatics egged on by local Communists that we should adopt the so-called revolutionary anti-colonial fantasies of Indonesia.

But today I think we need not feel so uninhibited about criticising our Indonesian Big Brother. After all for nearly two years the Indonesian leaders have not only denounced us as colonial stooges, as vile reactionaries who have deliberately denied ourselves of the joys of freedom allegedly enjoyed by the Indonesians but, what is more, the Indonesians are now determined to destroy us and crush us and ultimately devour us for our own good. They insist that we should accept them as Big Brother whether we like it or not. It is a case of "Be my brother or I'll bash your head in".

In these circumstances, I think it is only fair that we should be allowed to tell Big Brother where he has gone wrong and why he has gone wrong and why, therefore, we Malaysians cannot tread the path that Indonesia has taken.

The test of whether the Indonesian style of revolution or our style of revolution is the better must ultimately be judged by results. I am not for one moment suggesting that Indonesia should adopt our political style. All I am suggesting is that we have evolved a way of doing things which suits us best and which is producing better results than Indonesian methods.

As a country we are not as big as Indonesia. We are not as populous and most certainly our natural resources are as nothing compared to Indonesia's. And in the case of Singapore our natural resources are relatively nil. We are a swamp set in a not-so-emerald sea. All we have are some 1,800,000 people with a capacity for hard and sustained work. But we have managed to build an economy which offers our people not only one of the highest standard of living in Asia but also one where there is no mass starvation, where thousands of people do not have to rummage in gutters for food. True there is poverty; there is malnutrition and unemployment; there is maldistribution of wealth. But we have managed to preserve and sustain an economic structure which offers reasonable hope of eradicating poverty, of providing more employment and correcting obvious social injustices.

In Singapore as in the rest of Malaysia we have a sound and fairly efficient economic and financial structure to make life progressively better for our people.

This is largely attributable to our having avoided some of the economic fallacies which Indonesia subscribed to. We never subscribed to the fallacy of absolute economic independence. There are very few and possibly no nation in the world today which can claim to be economically independent. The 20th century world is a world economically interdependent. We recognise that economic development in modern terms requires large capital investments which may not always be available locally -- more so if a small country poor in natural resources and with rapidly expanding population and which has to develop rapidly.

We have, therefore, to rely on outside assistance technical as well as financial. Malaysia has recognised this as a fact of our economic life. We do not believe that independence by itself makes a country rich. All that independence does is to give us the political power to plan our economy in the best interest of our people. With political power in our hands we can invite foreign investments without being subjected to foreign manipulation.

To the rabid nationalist or the Communist this may be neo-colonialism unless of course the loan, investment or gift comes from a Communist country.

To ensure substantial investment, both foreign and local, we must have political stability, efficient administration and an incorruptible civil service and political leadership. By and large we have these things in Malaysia.

The Indonesians did not, not because they are less honest or less efficient than we are but because the political leadership in that country refused to face up to the fact that reconstructing a country is for the most part dull, hard work. Instead of settling down to the prosaic business of planning how to convert their vast natural resources into actual wealth, they expended their energy and talents on chasing romantic political concepts irrelevant to the country's real needs.

The more things got worse materially the more the leaders talked about the romance of revolution or fighting colonialism. For nearly a decade a disproportionate amount of money and energy were spent on preparing for the liberation of West Irian. It is not that the Indonesians were wrong in wanting to liberate West Irian but that the primary goal of improving the livelihood of the people was subordinated to this major obsession. In later years the West Irian issue became a convenient excuse to explain away worsening economic conditions in Indonesia. This last vestige of Dutch colonialism, it was explained, was wholly responsible for Indonesia's worsening economic conditions. Once West Irian was liberated, then all would be fine. Perhaps the major mistake of Indonesia's leaders was the carefully cultivated delusion that all their ills were caused by colonialism. Instead of getting down to the work of putting their country on their feet, they kept on wailing and beating their breasts about the evils of colonialism even after they had attained their independence.

One reason for this is that many of the Indonesian leaders made their name and reputation by fighting colonialism for the better part of their adult life. Their pattern of thinking, their political concepts and even their tactics for manipulating men were all derived from a life time of colonial struggle and sacrifices.

It became extremely difficult to remould their thinking and their emotions for a new and different kind of fighting - to fight poverty, to fight for positive things like rebuilding a country's economy, creating a sound administration, evolving a political style requiring not the weakening and overthrow of a ruling colonial regime but the consolidation and strengthening of the state.

The rebel - and that is what an anti-colonial fighter is - had suddenly to become a builder and preserver. The present Indonesian leaders could not and

did not make the necessary mental leap from rebels to preservers and builders of society.

Therefore they had to sustain the illusion that they were still locked in mortal battle against colonialism. It is my belief that the anti-Malaysia stand of the Indonesian leaders derives in part from the necessity to sustain the illusion that they are still locked in mortal battle against colonialism. With the West Irian issue resolved and therefore the anti-colonial struggle ended, a new anti-colonial menace had to be created.

That is where we poor Malaysians came in conveniently. What was once approved by Dr. Subandrio became, especially after the resolution of the West Irian problem, a neo-colonialist plot to encircle not only Indonesia but, according to President Soekarno, China as well. How ten million Malaysians could ever hope to encircle 100 million Indonesians and some 700 million Chinese is something which Big Brother has failed to explain.

Another fallacy which we in Malaysia have avoided is that the hall mark of a truly independent country is the sustenance of a large and expensive army. To our way of thinking the bigger the national army the less money there will be to fill peoples bellies or for economic development. In any case Malaysia with its small population can never hope to build an army capable of defending its territories against more populous and more powerful neighbours.

We have, therefore, to rely on friends who may have their own reasons for wanting Malaysia to survive. Had Indonesia been as friendly to Malaysia, it would have been just as inevitable for her to have been counted in Indonesia among our powerful friends.

But unfortunately Indonesia, with some 400,000 soldiers has become a threat to the independence and integrity of Malaysia. Indonesia's armed forces are not only responsible for the ravages to her economy - accounting for some 70 per cent of her national budget expenditure - but also for her expansionist tendencies. Given a disintegrating economy and 400,000 armed men all dressed up and with no place to go and a prosperous Malaysia as a possible prize, the temptation to expand becomes irresistible. That is how many countries in the past launched out on a career of imperial expansion - Japan, Germany, Holland and other Western colonial powers.

The allegation that Malaysia is a neo-colonialist plot is merely a pretext to cover up Indonesia's expansionist urge. I believe that unless and until there is a radical change in Indonesia's internal policies, the threat of confrontation will be with us for a long time. Whether confrontation will be converted into large-scale invasion of Malaysia will depend on two things.

First whether we are successfully cajoled into abandoning our defence treaties with friendly powers. The Indonesians are trying very hard with taunts about neo-colonialism into forcing us to abandon these defence alliances.

Second and more important is whether under pressure of border raids we can be bled economically and whether such economic strains and stresses can create internal disunity and conflict.

I believe that if we continue to find friends, both political and military, in Asia, Africa, America and Europe by convincing them that our cause is right, then the chances of large-scale and successful war against Malaysia by Indonesia will be remote.

I also believe that Indonesian confrontation will help strengthen unity in Malaysia far more quickly than would normally have been the case. There is nothing like an outside threat to bring peoples closer.

Given these two essential conditions, I believe we can stand up to the strain of confrontation longer than can an Indonesia which is economically shaky and which will not for long be able to get away with the thesis that Malaysia is a threat to Indonesia. There are signs, as the news of the last few days show, that Indonesia is getting the worst of the confrontation. The current famine and starvation may well be the beginning of more serious and more tragic dislocations in her economic and political life. The fact that the P.K.I. has now become critical of Soekarno, blaming the Government for the present famine may be the forerunner of mounting political tensions inside Indonesia.

Whatever happens in Indonesia, we can safeguard Malaysia if we are calm and determined to defend Malaysia because with all its faults it has managed to give meaning and substance to independence and democracy. We have shown, I think, that an independent Asian country can make democracy work efficiently, fairly and honestly. This is something worth preserving and fighting for - for the sake of Asia. Perhaps even worthier of preservation is

that we have shown that it is possible in a multi-racial and multi-cultural society to sustain a democratic system without unleashing racial demogogy and racial conflicts. Even older and more advanced democratic societies like Britain and America have not been able to avoid bitter racial clashes and conflicts.

We have, I humbly, submit very little to learn from Big Brother, except to learn from his awful mistakes. All we ask of Big Brother is to let us alone to solve our problems our own way. We have no wish to devour anyone least of all Indonesia.