

Dousing the flames of hatred

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Comment

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THE number of people who perished in the devastating Black Saturday bush fires that continue to rage in southeastern Australia has exceeded 200. More bodies are expected to be found as police comb the area for evidence that may help to identify those caught in the fire.

The Australian government has announced there will be a national day of mourning today to honour the victims of what is the worst wildfire in the country's recent history.

Sources are relating how the fires quite literally flew from one spot to another almost spontaneously. That the temperature stands at close to 50 degree Celsius is fuelling it further.

We can only sympathise with what is happening and hope that it will be over soon. But we can also learn from what the Australians are going through in their times of difficulty, literally or otherwise.



Victims of bushfires in Australia. We must also be careful about people who break hatred that can inflame our hearts and cause widespread damage.

In Malaysia, the likelihood of a wildfire of that dimension is probably remote, at least as far as recent history is concerned. As it stands, it is ironical to know that the local temperature is much lower than that in Down Under. Fortunately, we still have rain, off and on, to soothe the heat. We can only hope that we are spared from a similar widespread disaster.

Metaphorically speaking, however, we may not be quite as lucky after all. Judging from newspaper headlines, we could be heading for a spark-laden political space fuelled by heated arguments and counter-arguments. Some are triggered by mere lies and more lies.

There are threats of litigation and the police, despite all the criticisms, have come to be relied upon as more complaints are filed.

This is besides the protests launched by practically all sorts of groups. In short, there are serious possibilities that the political temperature will shoot up if things are not well mitigated. If enough sparks are generated, it could mean a very sad day for the country.

So when the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, during the opening of the second session of Parliament last week, spoke of his concern about the current state of affairs, including not being respectful towards the Federal Constitution, the sentiments were shared by many Malaysians.

This was especially so when it came to inciting hatred, be it through words or action. He aptly quoted that

history had shown that slander, jealousy and disunity among the people had caused the downfall of empires and civilisations. It should be remembered that only 30 years ago, we had had our share of a very tragic experience, one that remains a blot in our history until today.

Moreover, since many of the younger generations have little recollection what this tragedy is all about, the king's reminder is timely.

In fact, unless everyone has this "clear grasp", it is only a matter of time before the "arsonists" among us succeed in igniting the flame of destruction, much like that of the Australia bushfires, metaphorically speaking.

To be sure, such flames are even more dangerous because they can last through generations, and will continue to burn forever.

Unless, of course, all of us douse the sparks now, once and for all. The choice is ours.

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