

Shoe-ing out the president

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Comment

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IN a couple of days, the world will witness the inauguration of a new president. It is an event much awaited by the international community as a singularly historic moment besides putting to rest the effects of the Bush fatigue which was marked by an unprecedented range of notable failures, be it in diplomacy, wars, intelligence, science education, pollution control, immigration and, more recently, the economy.

Indeed, the Pew Research Centre quoted a finding where almost two-thirds of the people polled said they will remember the Bush administration for its failures. What is worse are the failed expectations after Bush took office, promising to change the tone of Washington, a promise of a better government and to unite rather than divide.

Unfortunately, none of these came close to be realised despite his two terms in office. In fact, some said he never did. Rather, he will be better remembered for some of the more dubious things rarely associated with the world's highest office.

It could be as simple as the mangling of the English language to the so-called murderous Bush Doctrine of preemptive, unilateral strikes. Of course, over the last eight years, the troves of political jokes revolving around the presidency have increased by leaps and bounds. It's as though the humour was purposely built-in as part of the presidency so as to lighten up the ever-growing gloom that emanated from the White House.

It is aptly symbolic that he was pelted with shoes during his farewell visit to Iraq recently. Though a crude gesture, it was not much different with the many things that he had done many times over that could be described to be just as crude, if not simply rude.

It is little wonder that his rating has dipped to the lowest point the White House has seen in recent times. He had a negative approval rating for almost two years, allegedly the longest streak since such polling began.

This is indicative enough of how the pollsters think of the Number One person in the US. No doubt he has contributed to his party losing the 2008 presidential election, but equally the Congress as well. It was so much so that his presence in the campaign for the White House was hardly noticeable, perhaps to avoid the jinx, if not just the sheer embarrassment each time he opened his mouth. Even fellow Republicans tried hard not to be associated with him, as apparent during the debates aired over TV.



George W. Bush continues to be parodied after an Iraqi journalist threw his shoe at him in protest against the US invasion of Iraq

Truly, he is a lame-duck despite all the hawkish rhetoric. He has brought US close to a "failed state" because of sheer arrogance and ignorance.

Not only is his moral authority fast slipping from his grasp, so too the country's economy. Consequently, he will leave behind on-going wars gobbling up trillions of US dollars, a budget deficit of more than US\$450 billion (RM1.575 trillion) as well as more than 10 million unemployed, said to be a 16-year high.

This does not include the wasted lives as a result of the culmination of the presidential failures; and the collateral damage, some of which seemed quite deliberate, many of which the US got away with by merely apologising.

Maybe a case can be made to his credit for making Iraq and Afghanistan relatively free and for halting another terror attack on the US. Still, judged by the almost limitless latitude available to the office of the president, and the accessibility to the world's best intellectual capital, what was hurriedly achieved thus far cannot be more disappointing.

The rush to declare "Mission Accomplished" following the fall of Saddam Hussein is perhaps classic in this sense.

So, what can we expect when the new president is sworn in on Jan 20? With so many things that have gone terribly wrong for so long, to some extent it will be very difficult for the new president to under-perform his predecessor and he cannot possibly go "wrong".

In fact, the converse is also true and, naturally, there is a heightened expectation for him to clean up the mess left behind, given the "audacity" of hope that the president-elect seems to be championing. His promise, directly or otherwise, to unbundle what W. has done is bound to rekindle more hopes among Americans and the international community alike.

After all, a significant part of the latter, too, faced much of the brunt which have in some ways taken a toll on the policies and actions of the previous administration.

On reflection, similar optimism and hope had surrounded Bush's ascendency to the presidency. And now Bush stands to be one of the worst, if not the worst, US president of all times. How he squandered the opportunities to be a great president is what Obama should quickly take heed and learn from. The presidentelect may also want to consider the audacity of humility, in addition to hoping that he would also not be shoe-ed out, too.

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