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Charade of reformasi under `Freedom' label

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MY son was asked by a friend to perform at a concert on Nov 14 which, he was told, had "Freedom" as its theme. So he wrote his own monologue, added a song and dance routine to it and, as it was his first ever solo, proudly invited his family to support him at his performance.

When we arrived at the venue, a hotel of long standing and unblemished repute, we were told that the concert, which was the culmination of a week-long forum would begin at 9pm. We were ushered downstairs to a restaurant where free food was being served.

I admit I was impressed with the service. However, on my return to the foyer outside the concert hall, I noticed with some concern anti-government literature and posters lying around and asked one of the organisers what these were about.

I was reassured that these were some of the subjects discussed at the said forum. The concert, I was told, was a coming together of different countries to display different art forms with a common theme of "freedom".

The first item for the evening was an interesting dance routine with dances from various ethnic origins coming on stage representing life (water, earth, etc).

The dance culminated with the audience being asked to join in the dance of life and as good sports we did so.

We were beginning to enjoy ourselves when someone came up on the stage to announce that someone else, in the foyer, had an exciting update for us. We were still in a stupor over the interruption when a young man came on to announce his "update".

I cannot describe the feeling of horror when I heard the "update". The young man proceeded to inform the audience that 5,000 people were at that very moment assembled at Kampung Baru. A loud cheer from the audience greeted the news.

My daughter and I exchanged startled glances. Still bemused, we then heard the speaker ask everyone to raise their hands and repeat after him three times, "Undur Mahathir" (Mahathir step down).

Sick to the core that we had been so naive as not to have seen through the concert guise, my daughter rounded up our friends and we left in the midst of these shouts.

Once outside I cornered a friend who was on the organising committee and demanded an explanation for her lack of clarity as to the actual purpose of the concert.

She said that she was also unaware of this particular agenda. We then told her that we wanted to have no part in this and removed our names and contact numbers from their guest registration book.

On the advice of this friend, we went down to the coffee-house to wait out the rest of the evening, until my son was scheduled to perform.

Five minutes before his performance, my family and friends went back to the hall, gave him our support and left immediately afterwards together with my son. He was also visibly shaken by the whole incident.

I have this to say to the organisers of the concert. Your organisation claims social responsibility. How responsible is your organisation when innocent people are used to further your cause. My son was innocent.

He clarified with the organisers many times as to the purpose of the concert and each time he was told it had absolutely nothing to do with the reformasi movement.

How socially responsible are you when under the guise of a concert you use a reputable hotel's premises to chant anti-government slogans with the knowledge that the authorities could burst in and arrest innocent people, who were there for an evening of fun.

If this was the agenda, we should have been informed at the door, giving us the choice. So, before you plan your next charade, I hope you have someone who can take Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's place.

I am not saying that Dr Mahathir is perfect. After all, he is but human. But, for now my bet is on the man to steer us through these times.

My bet is on the man who launched MSC, bid for the Commonwealth Games, lowered interest rates so we don't lose our homes and held his own against forces greater than himself. Show us a better man and Dr Mahathir will step down gracefully.

Until then, for those of you who feel the need for reform, begin by looking inwards. Instead of taking to the streets, look nearer home. How many of you have no time for your own parents ... have put your parents in nursing homes?

How many of you are parents yourselves of neglected children, children abusing drugs? How many families are being destroyed because parents don't care enough about each other?

How many abandoned children are there in foster homes and orphanages? How many of the landless poor have "life", as depicted by earth, sun and water?

It is so much easier to look for reform outside of us ... let's take a good hard look at ourselves.

And so, to the organisers of demonstrations, stand-offs and show-charades, go home - your wives, husbands, parents, children, loved ones and friends need you. Leave politics to the politicians - after all - you put them there!